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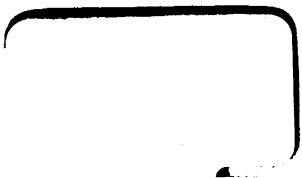
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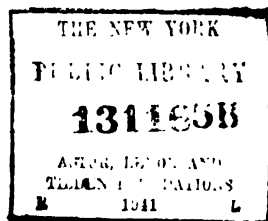
BY THE
REV. JAMES PYCROFT, B.A.
TRINITY COLLEGE, OXFORD,
AUTHOR OF
"TWENTY YEARS IN THE CHURCH," "ELKERTON RECTORY," ETC. ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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AGONY POINT.

CHAPTER I.

**TOM DETERMINES TO FARM HIS OWN LAND—
MINNIE FINDS A FEW PRACTICAL DIFFICULTIES
IN THE MATTER.**

WE have all observed in *The Times* an occasional advertisement of some easy and comfortable situation for an active-minded man of gentlemanly habits.

The man of experience immediately cries out, "This a great deal too good to be true;" while any one, so unwary as to go near the advertiser, is told very speciously that if he will only put a thousand pounds into a certain business, he may draw a salary of two hundred pounds a-year out; but he is *not* told, but left to find out for himself, that this liberal allowance will continue as long as circumstances may permit, no longer.

But what is always so tempting, so exactly

suitable to the case of numbers of her Majesty's subjects, is this :—that “ no special qualification is required ” for the said business “ beyond the habits of a gentleman.”

Gentleman-farming rose before the mind of Tom Langley as an easy and comfortable occupation of the same kind : neither did he think that he at all required the plenary indulgence of “ no special qualification : ” because he was—all allowed that he was—strong, and handy in the use of all kinds of tools. Tom was also fond of gardening, haymaking, wood-cutting, and every kind of out-door occupation. He had also a very fair smattering of agricultural learning, and was as loud as any one in his complaints that the farmers grew fat at the expense of the landlord : and the reason that rustics were so heavy and stupid was, that they had too easy a bargain to sharpen their wits.

In short, the ignorance of farmers with Tom Langley was a constant theme, and he was always reading about soils and manures, and all the improvements of model-farming and high-farming, purposely to puzzle some Farmer Sleepy-head, and to show the unrivalled advantages possessed by men of classical education.

Certainly, it must be admitted, that as far as reading and intelligence were of any avail,

Tom might fairly claim to be superior to half the parish ; the only thing was, he did not consider that ignorant people are not the less cunning ; still less did he reflect that a man, who has a conscience, deals at a decided disadvantage with those who have none ; neither did it ever occur to him that he might possibly find the same trouble in getting a fair day's work out of his men as Minnie had already experienced with her maids. — All this he had yet to learn.

However, as some leases had by this time run out, Tom determined to farm that part of his estate for himself, and gave notice to his trustees accordingly. The trustees surprised him very much by referring him to their solicitors. And each of these solicitors explained to Tom that he must pay the rent regularly, like any other tenant, though his trustees had to repay with one hand what they received with the other.

Tom was obliged to comply, though he thought now more than ever that, of all the useless and pragmatrical people man ever was encumbered with, trustees were the worst.

Whether he ever had reason to alter that opinion the sequel will show.

This determination to farm his own land was a sad disappointment to the old tenants. They talked of the improvements they had

made, and of the money they should leave behind them, all sunk and buried in the soil. Still, Tom was all the more convinced of the wisdom of his policy.

The unhappy tenants were Farmer Thord, Farmer Barnett, and Farmer Brown; each of whom held other land sufficiently near the estate to ensure that they would always be looking on as critics agricultural—no friendly critics, we may be sure, of any gentleman's farming operations.

Tom's argument was the old one.

"If it pay them, it will pay me. What folly, when farming is positively an amusement and a pleasure to me, to give others all the profits of my estate!"

Minnie was soon fired with the same agricultural enthusiasm, as she would have been with anything else that promised a little variety, and a free and healthy sphere for her energies. Arcadian scenes rose before her poetic imagination, with frisking little lambs enlivening the prospect, most docile of cows, and picturesque milkmaids. Little did she dream of the cows kicking the pail over, or of the milkmaids throwing the stool at them in a rage, and then going straight to the pump to make up the quantity they had lost in transparent sky-blue!

Tom and Minnie could neither think nor talk of anything else but the pleasure and profits of their new vocation ; not like any menial trade quite a gentleman's, nay, a nobleman's pursuit ; dukes and earls, and almost all the House of Lords, boasted of their apoplectic pigs, and fine-figured cows, to show shapes against all the country.

In every way it was regarded, the enterprise seemed unexceptionable.

" For, no such plan was e'er designed
As raising crops, ' to raise the wind.' "

Minnie viewed chiefly the pretty, the pleasing, and the poetical side of the question.

Tom viewed chiefly the theoretic and the science. He was full of new plans of growing wheat, beyond all averages known at Brendon. He would also have the most ingenious machinery, to work ten times as fast as any labourer in the parish.

But there was one side of the question to which neither of them particularly attended ; namely, the debtor-and-creditor side, or the loss and gain of the matter. The consequence was, that Tom spent as much money in machinery as it would take years to repay ; and, as to Minnie—she was never so happy as when

she was sending off the profits of the farm in neatly-packed baskets of eggs, pork, or house-lamb, as farming presents to her friends.

One of these presents is doomed never to be forgotten in the annals of the Langley family ; —for, one day they killed the prettiest possible little sucking-pig, and this Minnie sent to the rich Mr. Samuels, forgetting he was a Jew !

Of course, it was some little time before all these economic fallacies began to produce any staring and startling effect.

Railway Directors are not the only gentlemen who, “to make things pleasant,” charge all losses and extravagance to capital, and divide and spend their receipts as happily as if nothing had happened. The gentleman-farmer often does the same ; and the consequence is, that both may remain some little time in a very charming state of innocence before the capital has leaked out sufficiently to correct this pleasing illusion.

But, to enter a little on the farming operations, the most disappointing thing possible, enough to try the patience of any inventive man alive, was this, that when the machinery was bought, the men showed the direst aversion and the most sneering unwillingness to use it.

This was not all from sheer stupidity to

understand, what they called, "them new-fangled tools;" but there was a kind of rural super-s'ition "that 'twasn't to be;" and even to handle them seems loss of caste.

"It is a cutting of our own throats," said one.

"It is a starving of the babby not born," said another.

"It will put an end to all wages and send us right away up to the workhouse," said a third.

Still, after a while, all this evaporated, or seemed to have evaporated, in grumbling, and all went to work. Tom rose early and was always watching and directing his pet machines, till the men became comparatively used and reconciled to them: not, indeed, that they ever liked them or at all wished them to succeed; no, in their hearts, they were all against the success "of them notions," and the slightest hitch in the machinery, far from being met with any ready tact or extra exertion, brought, perhaps, three men, two horses, and a boy, to a dead stand in the middle of a field, and something like, "I told ye how it would be," was sure to come drawling out; for that sapient remark was ever ready on their stupid lips. Indeed, every mishap was hailed as a fulfilment of their lugubrious predictions.

"I don't see the saving of that machine," said Farmer Thorold. "Working Broad Meadow used to take two men two days in my time, sir; and you have had two men and a horse, and half a day longer about it: let alone the job for the blacksmith in tinkering up that 'what-d'ye-call-it.'"

Every field that Tom farmed, every definite piece of work that he had finished, drew forth the same unpleasant comparisons from some one. Whether with machinery or without it was all the same. Three days or three men, with the discarded tenant, was credibly reported to have done as much, and done it better, than four days would do for the much-perplexed and puzzled landlord.

The truth was, Tom was no match for the clodhoppers of Brendon. That part of their skulls which was intended to hold sense, some malignant power had filled up with deceit and cunning.

The common farmers understood this well enough.

"None of your nonsense, but be off by Saturday night," was their short and summary reply. "But," said Farmer Brown, "the gentleman has got hold of some of the biggest shirkers in all the parish, and if he don't get

much work out of 'em he gets lots of lies. If lies would make the corn grow Squire Langley would be richer than any of us, and no mistake at all about it."

The Rector shook his head, and looked on ominously. He had not been so many years at Brendon without knowing how poor a match any man of the habits and feelings of a gentleman is both for the labourer, who will do no more work than he is obliged to do; and also for the fraternity of farmers, who look upon the gentleman as so much fair game and plunder.

It soon became known that Squire Langley's was the most popular service all the country round, and there was not a labourer but would leave almost any place, as they said, "to oblige the gentleman." Farmer Edwards chuckled as he told the tale, how he had heard John Hodson say, in a public-house, that he could afford to stand a pint of beer because he was going to have a quiet time of it—full-pay and half-work—down at the Squire's."

All this was indeed but too faithful a representation of the Langley farming operations, even while Tom was at home and looking on; but of course there was a limit to this: he soon grew tired of so much personal attention, and after that, when once the men were

left to themselves, all the farmers said it really was spoiling all the parish—it was a crying shame—it was “cruel to see how they did idle about.” One man was overheard rating another somewhat to this effect: “Why, John,” he said, “if your work doesn’t last two days I shall be forced to finish mine in one;” and, after this manner, there gradually arose a tacit understanding that every man should loiter and waste his time in one plausible and uniform ratio.

Most persons are aware that the cost of labour is the great outlay in farming; we may, therefore, imagine what must happen when a gentleman works at a disadvantage of one pound out of three in so large an item as labour alone! As to the profit of machinery—this may be much or little, or there may be a positive loss, according to the willingness of the labourer or the extent and nature of the farm.

One day Mr. Eddowes, a retired cotton-spinner, put a very longheaded question to Tom, and that quite inoffensively and without the least touch of satire, though it did, indeed, raise a point for reflection which Tom thought of many a long year after.

“Mr. Langley,” he said, “with steam or with waterpower, we can all check the workman, and ensure so much labour for so much money:

the machine must go on and the men must keep pace with it: but how is it possible, save by incessant vigilance, to get your fair pennyworth of labour out of these half-cunning and half-witless clodhoppers, or from a set of chattering, idle women?

The Rector thought this a very sagacious question: especially as he had more than once observed, that the moment Tom's back was turned the men would stop and indulge in a pipe, and the weeding-women would sit down to darn a stocking under the hedge.

Tom now began to think, that of the many species of the great human family the one called farm-labourer was the queerest to manage. He complained that it was very much like driving a post-horse, which would trot away cheerfully for his proper driver, but turned dull as a mule with any other hand.

However, all this seemed to have so little to do with scientific farming, or the principle of the thing, that Tom still looked forward confidently to the result when, with a little more experience, his machinery and his men had become better acquainted with each other, and the whole farm was in good working order.

By this time Minnie had discovered on her part also, that farming difficulties could arise

in-doors as well as out. She had determined there should be no such butter as hers, and if coaxing the dairymaid and using every kind of encouragement would have kept tubs pure and butter sweet all would have been well indeed : but, unluckily, Minnie had a nursery as well as a dairy to look after. Tom also expected a breakfast and a dinner not one whit less comfortable because the cook could plead on her part that she had a dairy as well as a kitchen : we may, therefore, imagine how cruel — how trying — was Minnie's disappointment to see Tom, morning after morning, look at the heavy home-made bread, and smell at the butter, with a very sorry expression of countenance.

At the end of the first year there was bad news from the farm — Minnie's favourite cow died in a most interesting situation. That was very hard on poor Minnie. She had ordered the lady-cow the best of caudle, and stood by while it was poured from a horn down her dying favourite's throat. Tom saw Minnie was out of heart ; so he affected to make light of it, as one of those losses to be reckoned in all farming calculations. The result was, that neither he nor Minnie at all realised the fact, that it considerably detracted from the economy of home-made butter and cheese.

Before the cow was actually dead, though positively coming to her last gasp, the head-man of the farm proposed to kill it, "in time to save its life;" for then, he suggested, it could be sold with a better conscience!—This alone might have proved how much they had to learn in the art of farming.

But, misfortunes — least of all farming misfortunes—rarely come singly. On one occasion, there was a quantity of cheese made: Tom never forgot the date of this cheese, because it was made not long before his darling Julia was born. Well, Minnie had just then, and for many months after, quite enough to think of besides cheese; still, if she had known anything at all about the matter, she would no doubt have given directions. But, lo and behold! when the cheeses were wanted, they were proved to be nearly spoiled for want of turning and wiping, and not fit to carry to market!

Tom was disposed to be angry at this, as if it were a very culpable piece of neglect on Minnie's part; but now Minnie's spirit was up. She replied that really she did all she could, but, considering she never pretended either to the habits or experience of a farmer's daughter in pattens and linsey-woolsey, he should never have ventured on a dairy on so large a scale.

We are only relating what almost every amateur farmer will feelingly confess, if we say, that at every point and every turn Tom Langley paid more and received less than the heavy-looking farmers in fustian and corduroy. Farmer Thorold, one day, proposed this toast at the market table: "Here's to Squire Langley, and every gentleman who farms his own land." All such news as this crept round from the men to the maids, and was sure to be poured into poor Minnie's ear.

But, besides working the land and raising the crops, no small part of farming consists in buying and selling; and all this requires an agent—a man who, for a commission on every bargain, attends markets and fairs to buy and sell the stock.

Farmer Billings was the name of that exceedingly wary agent, who was quickly known in every fair to be buying pigs or selling sheep for the enterprising Squire of Langley Hall. Every farmer thought, "This is the time for a little easy dealing!" and men did say, that if Farmer Billings ever did chance to make a good bargain for Squire Langley early in the day, he would, somehow or other, be sure to take 5% or 10% for his bargain before night; and then he could easily buy a lot so much dearer for the Squire!

“Yes,” said Farmer Bratten, “and neighbour Billings knows how to sell, as well as how to buy, all in favour of his own book.” There was a tacit understanding between Billings and his neighbours of this kind: “We won’t, either of us, be too hard upon the other”—which meant, in less conscientious language, “You shall buy the Squire’s hay a little cheap if you’ll afterwards let me sell my corn to you a little dear.”

That such robbery happened sometimes, there is no doubt; and, perhaps, few squires ever buy or sell through an agent without paying not only the commission—though that is no small deduction from profits—but, indirectly, they deal at a much heavier disadvantage still.

However, as Tom was still very sanguine of overcoming all his difficulties, we will leave him for a while, till we have taken up other parts of the Langley history.

CHAPTER II.

HOW, ECONOMY BEING THE RULE OF THE DAY,
THEY ENGAGE MISS DREDGER TO TEACH ALL
UNDER ONE.

THE next time we went to see our friends at Langley Hall, Minnie, we thought, was not looking quite as well. She was not only some nine years older (and of this lapse of time the reader must do us the favour to take especial notice), but she also looked as if Father Time had been very cross with her. Minnie's high spirit, it is true, had held her own and borne her through many a struggle quite triumphantly: still, spirit is not strength; and these noble, high-couraged creatures, of whom we say that they will go till they die, are not the less frail and mortal, but show the effects of wear and tear, and fret and friction, even more than the dull and doughy compounds, whom we so often see heavy as lead—the wrong sort to rise in the oven of life.

However, we must not forget that with ladies, as with butterflies, there are successive forms of development and various stages of existence : The bride—the wife—the youthful mother—and the anxious and contriving chaperon.

Minnie had not yet arrived at this last stage, at the period of our visit ; but she was drawing near it. It was the season of education—life and its responsibilities were now opening ; if not to her children's view, yet near enough to make the anxious mother, on the pinions of her hopes and fears, fly swiftly over the years between, and tremble for the days when her Sophy and her Julia would yearn to try an unassisted flight and to leave—we never know for what—the warmly-feathered parents' nest.

In this season of serious preparation, the affectionate mother was full of all patent-safety plans, short-cuts and contrivances, to disarm the tree of knowledge of its thorns ; to adopt homœopathic doses of every bitter, and hoping to reduce the wayward will from a state of dislocation and correct wayward habits by some painless operation, as under chloroform.

But, though these were the fond mother's wishes, her ways seemed to lead quite in a different direction. The sailors have a proverb

about "spoiling the ship for a bucket of tar" — Langley Hall education was spoilt in the same way. The Rector's idea of living at *Agony Point* had by this time been realised in all its queer and crooked consequences. Whatever they did must now be done economically, although, of all things in which you must never expect to profit by a one-sided contract, we would particularly specify everything that depends on the electric energies of the brain of man or woman.

However, Mr. and Mrs. Langley set to work with a governess named Miss Dredger. She was engaged on a perfectly honest—a fair and a clear understanding to save all masters, and to cover all expenses under one: for, as to masters, after Tom's late experience with the organist, he could not possibly, with any colour of consistency, admit one inside his doors. Accordingly music, drawing, arithmetic, use of the globes, writing, and wax-flowers, this universal genius undertook to teach. She had also to attend to their dancing and deportment, and was to be their companion at all hours.

And here it must clearly be understood that Minnie was of far too feeling a character not to treat the governess with all possible kindness and courtesy, still, as Miss Dredger had deliberately professed and covenanted to be ac-

quainted with all these arts and sciences, and thinking, perhaps, that the more of one the less of another, so it all went down to the day's work — the result was, that she was kept in one economical course of duties, as if brains and nerves were of the toughest of all materials. She of course became, in a very few days, a mere apathetic mechanical drudge. To give her thoughts, sympathies, and interests general permission to be off where they pleased, and to work like an automaton—this was essential even to life itself, and highly excusable as an act of pure self-preservation.

Little hope was there indeed of Miss Dredger's ever kindling the smouldering flames in any youthful breast. Miss Dredger had no fire to spare; she was not paid for it; and she had no time to keep such intellectual fires in: she was a negative—a nonconductor; there was no electricity in her whole composition; the whole battery being discharged after the first three days. French became positively a dead language in her hands; poetry fell flat as prose; and as to Schiller, she looked as she drawled over the lines as if she heartily sympathised with Dr. Tatham, who said from St. Mary's pulpit, at Oxford, that he "heartily wished your Garman critics were drowned in the Garman ocean." It

was, perhaps, fortunate that, for fear our surprise should find vent in some uncomplimentary expression, we received a hint from the Rector to be a little guarded in our remarks.

"I must tell you," said he, "that I quite stirred up a French revolution in Langley's schoolroom."

"How so?"

"I pointed out that all their French grammar, beyond the most simple elements and accident, was trash, or at the best out of place: and I seriously told Tom that so many pages of his churchwarden or farming accounts — a sore subject, I fear — would do the poor girls just as much good. Of course they backed me up, and declared they neither understood nor remembered one word of 'the botheration stuff;' and Sophy, who really is a clever child, said that 'topping and tailing the words to fit into the exercise was all guess-work at last.'"

At that very time Julia was learning, she said, "Compound Derivatives" in grammar, and Sophy was learning a page of Levitical "Defilements" from Watts's *Scripture History*!

"Then," we said, "Mr. Farren, what will be the result of this blind work? — there is no education in it."

"Nine country-house schoolrooms out of ten

—almost all where the father does not happen to have correct notions on education proper—I find in the same state. You ask, what comes of it? Well, life has bitters and repulsive duties; so far the training, by great good luck, is in some way useful.”

“But as to a taste for the pleasures of literature?”

“No no. They gain little indeed of that. It is the way to make them forswear books for ever. Still, the worst governess cannot altogether quench this taste where it exists; but the cruel part is, that all accuracy, attention, reasoning, reflection, self-command, method, and precision, as well as a memory exercised and a mind stored for six or seven years with all the beauties of poetry and wonders of creation: that this rich crop—the most certain return of any in mental culture—is commonly nearly all lost, while odds and ends of everything specious and perishable, like gaudy flowers without roots and planted out of season—*this constitutes female education!*”

“And what is the cause of this error?”

“One great cause is a foolish ambition, aiming at more than we can effect, and more than we can afford. The education—I mean, the expensive accomplishments—of a peeress, are all attempted with the limited

means and opportunities of a poor squire. The sound and the solid—the substance—is sacrificed from catching at the shadow, which soon disappears: the tinsel rubs off, and the result is, a mind like my dear wife's, who, as everybody knows, has good natural talents, only her wits are like tools all loose in a bag; so little is her command of them."

We afterwards found that the Rector was quite an enthusiast in Education; by which term all he understood was, cultivating tastes and forming habits.

"Only reflect," said the good man, with much deep feeling, "how many are the hours of life in which my dear little friends, Sophy and Julia, will be thrown on their own resources—how many the sorrows to which a good book is the only anodyne—how many the uneasy moments in which a favourite author is the best of councillors, and his works a very pillow of repose!"

"And you fear that Miss Dredger does not go the way to make our young friends take pleasure in such things?"

"No, no. There is little hope of such a result. But it can't be mended, unless I can guide them a little, and indoctrinate their mamma with correct notions. Well, well," he said, musing, "I will try. However, it cannot be helped. It

is the way of the world at the present day. We give the poor children stones for bread. Everything crude and indigestible—everything most repulsive to the taste of children—forms the daily diet of poor, unhappy young ladies.”*

Poor Miss Dredger! We have heard of a nursery being built apart from a house—a schoolroom, at least, might with advantage be placed far out of the way of the parents. Miss Dredger, with all her long list of arts and sciences, had a little unexpected relief very often.

Tom was so fond of his children that he could rarely leave them a whole morning alone. Julia was his more especial favourite; because she happened to have been left at home to keep him company on one occasion when Sophy went with her mamma on a visit to Charlotte Mildmay. So, Tom and Julia would frisk and play about together like two kittens: you would really think Tom was but twelve years old when you saw what a playfellow he made for Julia.

Sometime after Julia had a serious illness, and hung for two days poised as between life and death. The distracted father felt, when the

* Not to pull down without building up, the Author has endeavoured to supply an alternative in his “Course of English Reading, or How and what to Study.”—Longman and Co. and all booksellers.

fever had abated, and the lustre had begun to return to his darling's eye and the colour to her cheek, that he received his child almost from the grave ; and this tended much more to rivet the already strong ties of parental love. Yes, Tom was the kindest of fathers ; but there is such a thing as a cruel kindness, and that may, perhaps, yet more plainly appear.

So, the children were constantly being taken away from the schoolroom.

"It can't matter, you know," said Sophy ; "for, Mr. Farren says that our grammar is all a pack of rubbish ; and if you had to learn it, papa, you would say so too !"

If Miss Dredger had some days to yield to the papa, on other days the mother would also be weak enough to interfere.

Minnie's own early education (so called) made her extremely incredulous of the good of lessons. She looked upon her children's education much as she did on the measles or the chicken-pox. "They must have it," she supposed ; but it was an infliction to be got through "in the mildest form : " and, provided she could reflect that "they had had it"—that it was over—and provided she had the satisfaction of feeling that no one could blame her for not duly inoculating them with Murray's Grammar, or

vaccinating them with Pinnock's History—she did not care whether they learnt much or little, seeing she never was very sanguine of any appreciable results.

Minnie, therefore, had no scruple in coming into the schoolroom and saying, "Poor things, they look quite pale! a good sign the lessons are not digesting this morning. Suppose, Miss Dredger, if you shut up all the books for this morning, and take them for a walk as far as the firs to see 'the lambs,' or, perhaps, 'the pretty cows,' their papa has bought."

From this it will appear that, if Langley Hall was not a very wise family, it was, at least, a very affectionate and a very happy one; and we admit, that it is of no secondary importance that learning should never be sought at the cost of love.

We remember a child who made a wry face and showed the greatest aversion whenever she saw the apothecary. Certain very strict papas and mammas forget that "a reign of terror" is no part of a patriarchal government. Indeed, such persons would do well to delegate the painful task to others, and, if there must be hatred, to be hated by proxy.

But Tom had nothing of the martinet in his paternal rule; and Minnie was equally far

from that character which imagination will persist in conjuring up—something high-capped, not sweet, but dry, negative, positive, and imperative—whenever we pass a “Finishing Academy.”

This being the state of the Langley family at the time of which we are speaking, Tom had occasion—or, at least, he thought he had—to go to London.

CHAPTER III.

HOW TOM, DESIRING TO BETTER HIMSELF, GOES TO LONDON, AND WHAT HE HEARS ABOUT DIVERS THINGS AND PERSONS.

THERE is a certain vague and indescribable feeling with family men, more especially if they cannot make both ends meet, that they needs must go to London. A decided change in their financial affairs, they are well aware, sooner or later must be made, and London being the place for business, they soon satisfy their conscience that it is well worth a journey, to keep up old acquaintance, to make interest for their family, and to talk about the money-market, and hear what is going on.

“I am altogether out of the way down at Brendon,” said Tom. “I am out of the stream. I am buried alive. No one knows what chances I have lost by leading such a life as this. Only think of Sir Edward Alex; what business he contrives to do, and that without following any profession any more than myself!”

Sophy and Julia brightened up at the thoughts of papa going to London ; well knowing that he never went away from home without bringing pretty things—enough to astonish all the shops in Arminster—home in his portmanteau.

But Minnie always paused a little when she heard of the name of Sir Edward Alex. Her wise and ever-loving friend, Charlotte Mildmay, had said emphatically, more than once : “ I don’t like that man at all, Minnie.”

But Minnie, without any prejudice against the mind or manners of Sir Edward, could never get over his conduct to Bella.

Minnie’s code of morals was far more strict than Tom’s—Minnie’s law of honour was utterly uncompromising : what Tom smoothed away as “ a failing,” “ a weak point in Sir Edward’s character,” and as “ following a course, too much the way of the world ”—Minnie denounced as living in all sin and wickedness. She asked if such a man could believe in any religion, or ever dare go to church ? and she strenuously, and indeed unanswerably, maintained, that unless he meditated the probability of marrying another, and basely abandoning Bella after all, he could not possibly have any objection to fulfil his promise, and to marry Bella at once.

Neither could Minnie bear the name of Bella. On this point Tom was far more emphatic. He accused Minnie of want of charity, and of harsh judgment, and then he found himself in a very ludicrous dilemma. Unless he blackened Sir Edward's character with touches of the deepest dye, he could not possibly give Bella the least shade of white.

Still, Bella's vindication required all of Tom's tact and eloquence, because Minnie did not much like the idea of Tom going, as she said—for, it was part of her character always to put the plainest thoughts into the plainest words—among company of a very second-rate and questionable description.

It was evident that Minnie, as she admitted, did not know, and “did not want to know, anything about such people;” and, we trust, that most right-minded ladies would feel equally averse to sully their imaginations either with their faults or their defence. But Minnie classed the whole fallen race as bad and utterly vicious, without one redeeming quality. She little thought that an appeal, far more eloquent than words, would one day prove the injustice of so sweeping a condemnation.

However, Minnie, after some consideration, was by no means unwilling that Tom should

go—in spite of Sir Edward, Bella, and all—because she knew he would call at Dr. Smoothall's, and see her dear boy Willie at the school, on his way home.

Arrived in town, Tom went first to see Sir Edward Alex. Bella, though disposed to be friendly, was evidently under considerable restraint. It had not escaped her observation, that the usual little kind postscript, or words of remembrance, had become more and more rare, till they dropped clean out of the “new style” altogether, from the date of Tom's marriage. So, feelings of restraint were inevitable with Bella. Any inquiry after his wife and family was difficult. The most natural and obvious reply was one that could not very easily be made. How could he say that he hoped one day to introduce them to her? How could he deliver any little polite message—as a married man has a standing order for advancing whenever courtesy requires—on behalf of his wife?

He was gratified to see that she and Sir Edward lived on good terms; and, as a proof of it, that she could command his purse, do much as she pleased, and importune and dictate to him, crossing him in little things, and always having something to say wherewith to qualify every proposal—in a manner truly conjugal.

Sir Edward seemed very busy, and to have irons innumerable in the fire. He was already quite a railway authority. He reminded Tom that he had long since told him that a man of any sense ought to turn his money over pretty fast in these days. He quizzed Tom's farming; said he seriously doubted its being profitable; and told Tom that, if ever he should be lucky enough to save any of his money out of the mud and the mire, his best plan would be, after so impressive a lesson about country speculations, to come up to London.

After parting from Sir Edward, Tom dropped in at the bank in Lombard Street, and saw Nat Foster. Foster was very busy in his private room; greeted Tom warmly as an old, and, we know, a much-respected acquaintance, all the more welcome as a family man; and then, apologising for a very brief interview, he invited Tom to dine with him in Eaton Square.

At dinner—or rather, at that best of all times for a little quiet talk of days gone by, when the ladies have retired and two old friends draw their chairs up to the fire—the conversation turned, as usual, on what had become of old acquaintances.

Tom was surprised; and every man, once living as a man about town, ever will be sur-

prised, to hear of the many who, in different ways, had come to grief.

The conversation was much of this kind :

“ Do you see much of Grinfield, Foster ? He was an old schoolfellow of yours, I think.”

“ Oh, no ! times are altered. Age makes all the difference. For a young scamp you may make some allowance ; he may be sowing his wild oats : but as to an old rake, when the seeds sown have shot up again in an inveterate and tangled crop of vices — as a family man I must, indeed, keep clear of him.”

“ And what of Wragley ? ”

“ Well, Wragley was not a bad fellow. I know you thought so : I thought the same. His principles would have been strong enough, only his temptations he took care always should be stronger. He was always involving himself in such desperate scrapes, and thus tempting Satan to tempt him. The end was that, being admitted into Ramsay and Martin’s house, after a time something was said to be wrong, and Wragley was shipped off, without being allowed much voice in the matter, to work in one of their corresponding houses in the West Indies.”

“ Very like being transported ! ”

“ Much the same. The staid and steady-going relative, who holds the purse, has a

strangely despotic power over the mere plague of the family who has reduced himself to beggary."

"Wragley was cousin to Harry Harter, was he not?"

"Yes, and Harry Harter is in no position to help him. You know Harry was a good scholar, and a clever fellow in every respect, and started with a good income. But he was a heedless, hair-brained fellow. Some one said that Harry was born with half a bottle of champagne in him, and had never yet got rid of the sparkling effervescence. Such spirits! Such good humour! Such a purple sunshine seemed to warm and mellow every day alike."

"Well, but a man cannot go through the world hallucinated thus."

"Oh, no! and so it proved. He spent nearly his last shilling. Then tried for employment. I used to meet him in the reading-room of the British Museum—quite a clover-field is that to a certain class of bees, who go to sip from many a flower of literature, and carry back the honey to their little cells, and there prepare it, not for future, but for present use and sustenance. Poor fellows! I know them by their looks, and deeply pity them. And Harry, I soon saw, was one of the busy number.

Then he applied to the publishers, with the best of testimonials: but Paternoster Row is not true to its name: it does not cast a very fatherly look upon any one. Indeed, as to business habits and punctuality, you had only to look into Harry's face, and you could prove an *alibi* of every thing of the kind. The end of it was, he was starved into being an usher at a school; where, quite seedy and threadbare, my brother accidentally found him, while going to see his boy at Hammersmith. Poor Harry knew my brother at a glance, and nervously turned away his face, and seemed choked with shame and contending feelings: however, Harry looked a little smarter for the interview in the course of a week."

"And can nothing be done for him? Is poor Harry there now?"

"No, I am happy to say Harry has once more a chance of living as a gentleman. An aunt died, and left him an annuity of 200*l.* a-year. As soon as Harry heard these truly welcome tidings he wrote my brother a very pleasing—a very gratifying letter, with a request to be favoured with the bill for the clothes. 'It would do his heart good to discharge it,' he said, feelingly: 'and the kind donor could put by the amount, if he pleased, for some other

silly fellow smarting under the natural consequences of his own riot and extravagance.' We afterwards discovered that Harry had written in similar terms to all — not a few — who had relieved him in his distress; writing in much the same form of words, that 'he hoped they would now have the satisfaction of seeing that he could take care of himself for the future.' "

It was time now to join the ladies, though the list of ruined men was not exhausted.

"I could tell you," said Tom, "of A. C——, who died in Nottingham Hospital."

"And I," said Foster, "have yet to mention that E. B——, one of the most fashionable men of my day at Oxford, died in Gloucester Union."

The reader may think that these are more cases than would fall under the observation of any one man. But not so. We seriously believe that, so perilous is the condition of idle young men, early their own masters, beset with craving appetites from within, and with a swarm of sharpers, no less ravenous, from without, that many a man, conversant with London life, can count as painful cases from the number of his quondam acquaintance.

Indeed, the "history of the Isle of Dogs," or of men who "go to the dogs," remains to

be written yet. But happy are we to bear testimony that, though we have known one Etonian — yet young — sweeping a crossing, and another helping in a painfully menial occupation, yet we cannot remember a single instance in which any man fell painfully low from pure misfortune, nor, indeed, from the consequence of any slight and venial errors or imprudence; no, we could not mention one who had not, by wilful and reckless conduct, set utterly at defiance the repeated exertions of his friends.

In the course of the evening Tom remembered that the question he had put to Foster about Sir Edward had not received any definite answer. Tom drew up to Foster, therefore, while the ladies were at the piano, and endeavoured to draw him into conversation, in a confidential under-tone, as to Sir Edward and his boasted financial operations. In this Tom did not succeed. Foster seemed always to have some cause of interruption just at the moment the name was introduced.

Still, Tom thought it quite accidental: he did not reflect that silence was the very habit of a banker's life, and that, for the most part, no class of men know more about their neighbours, or say less.

It was observable, however, that when Tom

said he rather wanted to consult Foster, his friend, about some matter of business, and the manner of making most interest of his money, Foster immediately lent a ready ear.

"No lengthened audience is required for that, Langley: you are a family man, and out of business. Then the funds—the funds is the only investment for you—nothing else should be thought of."

This was not the kind of answer Tom wanted. Every man who is sufficiently interested in any matter to make it the subject of a serious question asks, of course only nominally, for his friend's opinion, but really for a confirmation of his own.

Tom therefore suggested, that surely all men did not limit themselves to so small a percentage?

"Then," said Foster, "if you want a large income every year, by far the best plan is to sell out part of your capital to make it up."

"But, my good fellow, surely you are not serious? Why, Foster, is this the advice of a family man like you?"

"Now then we are coming to the point," replied Foster. "If you change from the funds to any five per cent stock, this is only another way of living upon your capital. I see it every

day. The man dies; his executors must realise—and the ten thousand pounds has dwindled down to eight or nine. In other words, what I add to my interest, I take from my security ——”

“Well, but some men are more lucky, and ——”

“Lucky! yes, yes, I see much of that here, and both sides of the question; but that is not my line of business. I cannot enter into the sphere of luck, any further than to say that it is a game for men of large fortune—where the loss is immaterial, and where there are many speculative investments, as it were, to insure one against the other. But you must always remember, that where the gain cannot be enough to alter a man's position, whereas the loss would throw his family on the mercy of this rude world, why, then—heavy, indeed, are the odds that you have against you.”

But every man at all conversant with human nature will anticipate that Tom could not leave the matter here. No. He could not endure to leave off without something more consolatory than this advice, which implied no less than this, that Tom's case was desperate, and no new schemes, speculations, or investment could mend matters in the least. No, of course not. Who does not really pity the poor fellow?

Actually to be told that, in spite of all the claims of his family — of “what was expected of Langley Hall,” from time immemorial, in Brendon, and in spite of the many things that a man of spirit “must do,” — to be told, we say, anything as matter of fact as this, that if all he had was little, he must yet learn to live on less! No; the thing was impracticable: positively something else must be thought of.

Tom ventured, therefore, one more question, but only to draw forth a very long-headed and memorable reply.

“But do I not hear of men making commonly some fifteen or twenty per cent in business?”

“In business, yes: but then it is the business that brings this rich return, and not simply the money. Capital has two kinds of value: a very limited value where there is no labour added to it, which is your case; but an indefinite value when it simply serves as the tools or implements of productive industry. — Nine-tenths of the losses we hear of, result from the man who does not add the labour, expecting the profits of the man who does.”

Tom related this line of reasoning to Sir Edward.

“Nothing can be more true,” was his re-

mark. "And the object of these new companies is to combine the capital of idle men with the labour of men both of industry and experience, like your friend, Nat Foster."

This was very encouraging to Tom. The fact that the said idle men thereby become, technically, sleeping partners in these great concerns, with the usual liability of awaking to a sense of their position rather late—the fact, as the Rector would express it, that to labour by proxy is not the law of Providence, but an evasion which attempted wholesale brings down wholesale retribution—this Tom, like half of England about that time, had yet to find out for himself.

No doubt some persons may be eager to ask whether Foster did not more pointedly or emphatically apply his prudential maxims to the case of his friend. Surely, he must have seen a little of the natural inclination of his mind?

The answer is, that a man in Foster's position is always seeing this: he is almost daily in the painful position of finding men bent on a course fraught with danger—danger as palpable to his long experience as is the imprudence of the child to the foresight of the parent—and that without the power to stop them. Men like Foster, therefore, soon abate a little of their natural fire and enthusiasm; their hearts would be torn

to pieces if they allowed themselves to take so near and acute an interest in the operations of their friends. They have long learnt that urgent advice does little good. They content themselves, therefore, with laying down the line prescribed by long experience, and leaving matters to take their course.

However, Foster took leave of Tom in a very cordial and friendly way ; and said that if his interest could at any time avail his family, he should be always ready to exert himself in his behalf.

CHAPTER IV.

HOW MASTER WILLIE LANGLEY OUTGROWS HIS
MAMMA, AND IS SENT TO DR. SMOOTHALL'S,
WITH VARIOUS OPINIONS THEREUPON.

WE often aim at one thing in this life and hit another. A man often thinks some journey on business is so much lost time and money, and yet indirectly results arise of much importance to his future welfare.

It is to be hoped that this may prove the case in the present instance: for, Tom left London anything but satisfied. Sir Edward's remarks would have fired him with sanguine hopes, were it not that Mr. Foster carried a stronger moral influence, and did much to qualify Tom's confidence in high interest, cent-per-cent profits, and handsome dividends.

However, after making the promised purchases for Sophy and Julia, Tom determined to return by the way of Dr. Smoothall's, and to give Minnie an agreeable surprise by bringing home her darling Willie, to begin his holidays

a little earlier than the regular day for breaking up.

Master Willie we have not yet introduced. It is remarkable how often the boy is the mother's favourite. Where there is only one son, this is almost invariably the case : and Willie was really a handsome boy with fine open countenance, and an easy, soft, and affectionate disposition. Minnie thought there never was such a boy. He had beautiful curly locks, which Minnie delighted at seeing flow down his back ; indeed she was quite sorry when the time came that she was obliged to adopt a less girlish style, and cut them off.

Minnie really doted upon the boy from the cradle ; her cabinet contained many a little remembrance of his childish days : such as locks of hair of various dates, and one pretty pair of tiny blue shoes—being one of the many presents of his godmother, Charlotte Mildmay. These were especially treasured and fondly looked at in the long, long months of his absence. Minnie almost wished he could be always a child—so as never to be taken from her, always to be yearning for her, clinging to her, and depending upon her love and nurture as much as while he was small enough to wear these little shoes.

However, Master Willie grew fast and strong,

and quite as saucy and mischievous as other boys. The papa began to complain: he said it was a positive duty to send him to school. The quiet of his house and conscience both pleaded for the same thing. And—must we confess it?—every month it was more and more apparent—if not to Minnie, at all events to all lookers-on, such is the hard fate of all fond mothers—that the love and affection grew more and more on one side. Then Minnie had formidable rivals in the horses and dogs, the rabbits, the farm-boys who went birds'-nesting, and Mother Hodge, who kept the lollipop-shop; even the carpenter and the village blacksmith, all ever ready to humour Master Willie Langley by the use of a tool, or by mending a rabbit-hutch—all tended to divide the boy's affections, such as they were, with the ever-loving, ever-yearning, ever-constant and anxious mother.

It is instructive to watch a nest of little birds; while yet unfledged and helpless they may perhaps enable us to realise the sentiment of parental love and filial dependence; but observe them a little later, as at stage the second: they now seem all mouth and throat: the craving and the ravenous is the only idea that they suggest. Go again a week or two later: they now feel their strength, and there seems one only instinct, namely, to

desert and forget the parent bird—to fly away and to be clear of her warmly lined and marvelously constructed nest for ever!

There is something painfully human in all this!

It was a sadly trying day for Minnie when Tom said, after some months talking of it, and habituating his mind as well as Minnie's to the thoughts of so momentous a step, that he positively must inquire about a school. Still, Minnie stipulated that she should have a voice in the selection.

The Rector drily quoted the case of the fond and careful mamma, who said that her dear boy was only allowed to play in a padded room; whereupon some one was so unsympathetic as to ask whether the boy was afterwards to live in a padded world.

Minnie laughed and flipped her old friend with her glove, and said he must not be too severe upon her.

But when Dr. Smoothall's prospectus was laid before Minnie, as that of an establishment strongly recommended by Mrs. Burnett, whose boy had even survived the scarlatina there; as also by Mrs. Holland's daughter-in-law, who had never in her life seen such mending and packing up, with correct inventory, on the top of the box;

and thirdly, by Mrs. Willis, who was equally loud in praise of the 'washing and small-tooth combing;—when all these positive essentials and ostensibles were so respectably witnessed, then to read not only about Latin and Greek, but of a whole list of *ologies* into the bargain, besides the Smoothall attention to "manners"—in which Willie's usual attitude of sitting with one shoe under him and both elbows upon the table, showed room for improvement; as also "morals,"—of which Willie asked the English, and Minnie felt puzzled to explain it; and, to crown all, when Minnie read, "No corporal punishment;" why then the conclusion was irresistible—the choice was made; and Dr. Smoothall was hailed and greeted as quite a merciful dispensation to ease those sinking fears that in Minnie's mind were associated with the very name of a boy's school and classical education.

"There is to be no whipping, Mr. Farren," said Minnie.

"There is to be no work, Mrs. Langley," was the reply.

"The boy is to be taught with a view to the requirements of after life," said Minnie.

"Then I am sure you won't endure that: hard work, self-denial, Spartan discipline, Mrs. Langley. The power of saying 'No' to 'self and

partner,' besides being acclimatised for the colder latitudes of this terrestrial globe."

"But what has that to do with your favourite Latin and Greek?" retorted Minnie.

"It has a great deal to do with five or six years of that drill and discipline hardly to be found but at one of our old grammar-schools," replied her inexorable antagonist.

All this line of argument was, very naturally, too much for Minnie—kind mothers entrust to the instincts of the heart no little of the reasoning operations which men do all by the head.

Minnie said she was afraid Mr. Farren was quite one of the old-fashioned flogging generation. She had heard that, at these schools of rude discipline, this bracing atmosphere, recommended as a hardening process against the keener blasts of after life, meant, in plain language, no less than this—that her dear Willie should be made a fag or a drudge—a lighter of fires, himself doomed to shiver in the cold—a toaster of muffins, with no time to eat his own—and a warming-pan in ordinary for four or five beds before he dared creep into one himself.

Many a mamma will sympathise with Minnie. They will say with her, If life has its trials, these trials must come—we will not send our dear boys to inoculate them precociously with vice or

with misery, for the slight chance of their having in later years either the one or the other in a milder form in the natural way.

No doubt time was when many a poor boy was cruelly treated, by the neglect of masters and by a half-savage set of school-fellows. But those were days when the habits of the fathers as well as the habits of the sons were far more rough and unfeeling. In those days small schools, in point either of manners and of morals—vice and violence being not even qualified by any public opinion—had no advantage over larger numbers, which also, we believe, to be the case at the present time. Boys are far less happy at any Dr. Smoothall's, and are not half as likely to be broken of sneaking, dishonourable, and ungentlemanlike practices, as at a large public school, with its inspiring traditions and its code of unwritten laws, which, however imperfect, are decidedly better than none.

Little as we are disposed to vindicate bullying and tyranny, either among boys or men, we cannot but feel that parental tenderness leads too far the other way. "To be killed by kindness" is no mere figure of speech; and of this we fear that the history of Master Willie Langley will be a standing proof and memorial to all who hear it. The greenhouse-plant must not

be too suddenly exposed to nipping frosts; and parents would do well to remember, that, in the battle of life, there are quite as many hard knocks to encounter as in former times—nay more, competition is fiercer, and a single false step less easy to recover—wherefore, just a little of camp life as a gradual initiation, may, at the cost of some present discomfort, save some dear son from sinking under the hardships of his first campaign.

And so it came to pass that Willie Langley was sent to Dr. Smoothall's, whose system was that much in fashion at the present day—to general-knowledge them into universal-ignorance—to administer volatile essences of everything—to despise (what few understand) the hard drill and discipline of a classical school, involving as it does, and what no English or “modern” establishment ever can do, *the sharpening and the setting of the wits to an extent that makes all after studies easy*, and all the *self-teaching* (the only teaching) *of life systematic and effective*—and to send the poor unhappy youth into life with a mind like a badly-tempered blade, and that loose in the handle, doomed to bend and blunt before every obstacle through which it ought to hew its way.

CHAPTER V.

HOW TOM FINDS THAT HIS FAMILY *WILL* GROW,
BUT HIS INCOME *WON'T*.

ONE of the favourite expressions of the Socialist lecturers used to be this: that man, instead of being held responsible for his actions, was entitled to pity, as the "victim of a combination of unhappy circumstances."

Many a family-man has felt a very strong claim to be judged by this truly indulgent philosophy. There are certain grooves in life; when once in, you find it very hard to get out. There are certain steep inclines—and if once you begin to slip, the head turns more and more giddy, the impulse is stronger and stronger—ties thicken, difficulties increase, and the unhappy man is truly "the victim of circumstances," beyond his power of control.

A "genteel income" has no kind of tendency to increase, but the expenses of a "genteel family" grow and expand beyond all calculation.

Not only does the jacket take more cloth for the boy, and the dresses more breadths for the girls, but the unhappy father is beset with the clamours of so many several progenies of ideas, notions, "proper pride," not to mention follies, scrapes, debts, and absurdities of all kinds; till the poor man's dilemma positively amounts to this — household misery if he does cry "Stop!" and ruin if he does not.

It is easy to say, "Make both ends meet," when, from a hundred insidious and subtle causes, everything is growing tighter and tighter. It is easy to say, "Reform, Mr. Langley." — "Mr. Langley, I would be resolute, and say 'No' at once." This is all very easy for a man not troubled with any heart or affections; but if you cannot carry your point without sad and sorry faces around your table, your mastery is a loss after all.

Reader, look back to the days of your youth, and say if you ever could realise the idea, often as you heard it expressed, that your unhappy parent really could not afford anything? Did not the family fortune suggest ideas of a boundless kind, so much so that all the little "'tis buts" seemed but as a grain from a sandheap? Did the idea that your parents must deny themselves to give to you, and that many a day and

night they have passed pacing distracted on the grassplot or tossing restless in their beds solely on your — yes, your very own most thoughtless, most thankless, importuning and clamorous account?—Did that ever make any deep and moving impression upon your sanguine and pleasure-loving mind?

Willie Langley was, at the time of which we are speaking, of a very troublesome age — too old to be treated as a boy! too young to be trusted as a man. He was a finely-grown youth: with all of his mother's fire in his eye and much of her vivacity and easy goodnature, but he had not quite that self-command and composure which characterises the "fellow" who has measured himself already with a good average section of the world he is about to enter, and who thus has found his proper place and level at a public school of five or six hundred boys. Dr. Smoothall never corrected him; Mrs. Smoothall indulged him for the sake of the Langley connexions; and the Miss Smoothalls, from the time he wore long-tailed coats, flirted with him and flattered him, and now, being nearly nineteen years of age, Mr. William Langley could leave his newly-engraved visiting-card, and was invited by every one around.

With his mother and sisters there was no

one to be compared to Willie. He could not only dress in the style most captivating in the eyes of Minnie and the sisters, but could find his way into Arminster, smoke cigars, play billiards, and give proof of other expensive habits, which, one by one, the father had felt it wise to break through, but now his economy was all in vain; for, behold the same expenses once more revived in the habits of the son!

This discovery was not only very trying, but it was also very disappointing and very perplexing to Tom Langley. He often complained to Minnie that he never intended his boy should be brought up with such habits. He had always promised himself that Willie's rearing should be ordered quite differently. The truth was, he had himself seen the absurdity and folly of all this style and fashion in mere boys, and was quite taken by surprise at finding that the smart of the father never serves for the son; still less did he reflect that the wisest of parents too often are like the hen at the side of the pond, when all her cackling cannot restrain the watery excursions of the ducks.

Money, money, money, was now the constant cry, if not of Master Willie, at least of sundry tradespeople and claimants various on his behalf. Poor Minnie talked and lectured, and

used her fond maternal arts of suasion—all in vain. Willie was always asking the mother to ask the father, and the father was now becoming soured and irritable. It cost him an effort to say No, and therefore the word “No” more and more frequently began to burst forth with angry remonstrance, with sharp detonating monosyllables, and with a desperate ebullition of feeling which ruffled the whole family, and flung a dark cloud over breakfast, dinner, and tea, for one or two days together.

On all these occasions Willie really thought himself a very injured individual.

In one sense this was true.

Willie had been reared with one set of habits; now he was to be launched into another.

The father had kept up the appearance of a man very far richer than he really was, and now the boy was virtually taking him at his own valuation, with ideas and expectations according to it.

Willie had been reared as if all the world were made for him, and now he was to be satisfied with a very insignificant corner in it.

Willie had been mixed and moulded to the temperature of the very tropics of luxury and indulgence, and now first heard of a frigid zone, where all was bleak and barren, fit only for the hardy sons of rigid self-denial.

Tom and Minnie began to talk seriously about this state of things; they counted the cost of his education. In his education he had never been stinted for anything. But the boy was still wrapped in the web of selfish habits, and self with a boy is all his little world, and all his narrow sphere.

"Willie has been taught this—Willie has been taught that," said Minnie; "everything practical and useful in life that we could possibly think of, Mr. Farren."

"My dear, good lady," said the Rector, most fondly and emphatically, "the Dr. Smoothalls impart all knowledge at the sacrifice of self-knowledge; and of all the useful knowledge in the *Penny Cyclopædia*, there is nothing half as useful as learning when to say that one word, *No*, to ourselves and others."

"His extravagance is frightful!" said Minnie.

"Extravagance is only one form of self-indulgence," replied the Rector; "and with the present hothouse system of boy-culture, extravagance is already one of the most striking of the evil fruits. Boys used to be tempted with tops and balls, and cakes and apples; but now they vie in fancy ties, and studs, and foppery, and tavern bills, and borrow money at the tailor's, to be charged the parent with the

clothes! A boy used to look happy at the small cost of half-a-crown, and now I cannot look at a neighbour's son in the school-yard under half-a-sovereign. It is a sad and painful truth, that debts and extravagance—long the crying shame of Oxford and Cambridge—are beginning at our schools!"

"And what are parents to do?" asked Minnie.

"Simply to treat children as children—to keep them in the background, as of the least possible importance, and teach them never to expect the indulgences of older persons. Boys used to boast of how they 'roughed it'—they used to exult in what they endured, and made light of—to be hardy was to be manly—the modern schoolboy they would have called a Spoony and a Fop. In one word, the boys were acclimatised more nearly to the chilly temperature of real life. True, the discipline was sometimes too severe, but the sorrow and the smart ended with the day."

"And now——" said Minnie, sorrowfully.

"And now," continued the Rector, "the sorrow and the smart may last them—for a life!"

This was a true prophecy of the future of Willie Langley.

Poor Minnie felt rather sorrowful. Still, she

did hope better things. Surely, "no one ever could be hard upon her own dear Willie."

One thing, however, was plain: things could not remain as they were. Willie was too old for correction of any kind, and being self-willed, and not dreaming he could be in the wrong as long as he limited his expectations to the style of his friends—albeit they were sons of far richer parents—he would now answer again, and try the temper of his father, which before had been fast changing for the worse, and Minnie lived in daily fear either of some expensive scrape out of doors or of some painful quarrel within.

Professions now were discussed; but Willie had "no taste" for any kind of work. Books were his abhorrence, and figures he liked still less. "No high stool and quill-driving for me," was his usual expression for nearly all the occupations that could be proposed.

But while something for Willie to do, and what to do with Willie, were questions which daily forced themselves upon the attention and the anxious deliberations of Tom and Minnie, there was another sore subject—another source of family disquiet, another standing grievance, which pressed more and more heavily upon them.

CHAPTER VI.

HOW TOM ARRIVES AT THE CONCLUSION THAT GENTLEMAN-FARMING DOES NOT ANSWER.

By this time Squire Langley's farming made no little talk. Topics of conversation are always scarce in a place like Brendon, and no topics are more palatable to the naughtier part of our nature than those which lead to that tart and slightly-acidulated gossip, which turns on the misdeeds or misfortunes of those around us.

In most country drawing-rooms there are certain stiff and chilly minutes before dinner, and a far more comfortable and self-satisfied time after dinner; and nothing brightens up and enlivens the conversation more than when some one starts some local topic, causing shrewd conjectures about a neighbour's plans, and ominous anticipations of what the end may possibly turn out to be.

Every one knows that in life, as in back-

gammon, there is a cruel satisfaction in hitting a blot in our neighbour's game; besides which, virtue, propriety, and good sense furnish nothing worthy of remark: but storms that have passed, or breakers a-head, are far more exciting than smooth and safe sailing, whether in the log-book or in life.

Of this kind of criticism Tom and Minnie had the honour of forming no small part at every dinner at which they happened not to be present; neither were Tom and Minnie allowed to remain long in ignorance of the diversion and chit-chat they were so good as to afford. For, tale-bearers, gloating, as usual, over the news at which they pretended to be highly indignant, were about as common in Brendon as in other places.

Minnie could not help feeling much disconcerted: she could not bear the idea of being conquered, or failing in anything; and while she knew that her taste, style, and superiority, and elegant arrangements within-doors, were accounted perfection, she was all the more sorry and impatient at the thought that the Langley reputation would have suffered in consequence of this most worrying and provoking farm.

But this was only part of Minnie's trials.

We once heard a lady feelingly observe, that

"if a man would make his wife and family supremely uncomfortable, and to live for ever on the fret, only let him enter upon gentleman-farming.

"From the time my husband began his farming, we lived in one intermitting fever of worry and annoyance. The milk and the butter at breakfast, the meat or the fowls at dinner, or, perhaps, the unprofitable crops we could see from the window, or dreaded to pass as we took a walk in the lanes, all served to touch the same jarring string, and made us wretched for the rest of the day."

Such was the state of Minnie's feelings; though, all the time, she was very little aware of the heavy losses sustained, and the rate at which Tom's money in the funds was running out. Indeed, money was a subject to which she had a natural unwillingness to allude. The loss of her small allowance affected her very deeply. Nothing, it is true, could be kinder than Tom's conduct ever since that painful occasion; still, the consciousness that she was able to provide at least her own clothes and pocket-money, and pay sundry small expenses, had been a great satisfaction to her: and, now that every penny which she spent, and even the presents that Tom feelingly suggested to her father and mother,

came all from one purse, the consequence was, that money became one of those subjects—and we all have one—which made her nervous and silent, and one which she was always disposed to waive, and ask no particular questions.

But Tom began to grow very uneasy: year after year he had been selling out his capital. The cause of exceeding his income was, first of all, to keep pace with the richer establishments around, and to preserve the dignity of Langley Hall. That alone had dipped into capital at the rate of 300% a-year; and now, in a sanguine attempt to add to his income, he was losing on his farm at least 150% a-year more.

It is bad enough for a man to feel himself a fool; but to be conscious that his friends know it too, is more painful still. Tom's farming losses were not only suspected, but confidently talked of, and even exaggerated. Envious neighbours tried Minnie's patience cruelly with that which is the very essence of impertinence, though administered often in its mildest form—that is, they were always either "regretting the dying lambs," "hoping better of the damaged hay," or "condoling for the blight in the corn," or disease in the potato-field.

Still, Tom kept his own counsel, and therefore flattered himself, that however much people

might guess, they could not positively know that on the balance his farm was a loss. But there was also a rapid wasting of his consols—a far sorer subject, and one which must be known to the very persons from whom he would most gladly have concealed it.

We have already introduced the father of Fred Audrey. This old gentleman, tired of doing nothing, had taken a share in the County Bank, in which Fred also had an interest. So, of course, he could not fail to observe, and to talk over with his son Fred, the growing fortunes of one man, and all that was ominous in the doings or misdoings of another.

It is wonderful what an insight a shrewd and experienced banker has into the state of a man's affairs. He often knows far more than the man knows himself.

“I can read,” said the shrewd old man, “almost any man's life in his banker's account. I know who lives on his income, and who eats into his capital—who pays at six months, and who at twelve—ay, and I can tell whose years begin to run altogether one into the other. Why, bless me! the baker, the butcher, and the wine-merchant, before we come to the drafts for the farm, in young Langley's account, belong altogether to another state of things!”

"Fred," continued the old gentleman, "I really do wish that I could save that poor young man. I am sure that he is a very good, well-meaning fellow; but he is possessed with one idea, and down! down! down! is his course. Now, I positively feel for him. What can we do to save him? Can you think of anything, Fred?"

However, what neither young Audrey nor old Audrey could be supposed to know, neither, of course, could attempt to remedy — still, all the time, Tom could plainly read the sad forebodings, with most grave admonitions in their very looks, of these two old and faithful friends.

Many a man can better face a serious misfortune than face a certain person, who, he fears, must know the folly and the fault from which it comes.

Such was the case with Tom.

The two Audreys, father and son, the old friends of his family — men who had seen him almost daily from childhood — he could hardly endure to meet. In one sense, it would have been a relief to him if they had both been dead and buried. Tom looked anything but at ease when he went to the bank: and when, at the end of the year, he gave another and another order to sell out stock, old Audrey's long face looked as a "book in which he could read strange

matters ;” and, what was worse, old Audrey seemed always in the way, and from his expressive silence, Tom could not help feeling that there was in his affairs something truly ominous and alarming, as by the general condemnation of all men of sense.

However, at last, having some business at Fred Audrey’s office, that kind fellow contrived to enter on the subject of farming, and Tom inquired why he had himself never tried a little farming. This was just such an opening as Fred desired. He immediately ran through all the dangers and the difficulties of gentleman-farming so truthfully, that Tom felt he was hearing the very history of his own mishaps.

This caused Tom very soon to open his mind. Immediately Audrey suggested that he should see his accounts, draw out a simple analysis as to the several sources of loss, and trace each to its real cause.

The result was, that a statement was drawn up at once, so clear and so startling that Tom’s eyes were opened to the utter impracticability of making head against the glaring conspiracy of shirking labourers and knavish agents ; to say nothing of the loss that resulted from his inability to stoop to the low and little habits of those with whom he had to deal.

This was, indeed, a happy day for Minnie. She could now see a prospect of once more living devoted solely to her family, with all her affectionate, loving heart, and enthusiastic mind, neither distracted nor damped with cares and responsibilities of so ungenial a kind. She greeted Tom with tears of joy and tenderness when he said the farm was advertised to be let, and in the course of a month the pots and the pans, guilty of so much bad butter and worse cheese, quickly disappeared from the unlucky dairy of Langley Hall.

CHAPTER VII.

HOW IT SEEMS TO BE INTENDED THAT ALL KINDS
OF BIRDS SHOULD LEAVE THE FAMILY NEST,
AND LEARN TO PECK FOR THEMSELVES.

HAVING given up the farm, there was for a short time a little lull and comparative composure in the Langley family ; but this was not doomed to last long. For, at the same time that Tom Langley put an end to his losses, he could not help realising the extent of those losses. The lawyer had drawn a most staring, a most uncompromising and matter-of-fact balance-sheet, and this adverse statement no "flattering unction," no trick of self-delusion, for one moment could disguise or conceal.

Add to this, Tom had now no occupation ; he had more time to brood over his difficulties, and Willie had become a constant blister—a cause of fret, and worry, and anxiety, at all times. Tom had lived long enough to see the effect of evil seeds—to understand in all its

varied consequences the wrong-headed notions and impracticable expectations of youth : he also knew that this "visual film" would only be "purged" from the mind's eye, and these vanities burnt out, by a painful cautery, and in the fiery furnace of a wild and reckless life.

It was, therefore, resolved, that the army should forthwith be Willie's destination, and Tom wrote to his friend Foster to use his influence to procure a cadetship in the service of the East India Company.

And could the fond mother—could the devoted, tenderly-loving Minnie, endure so hopeless, so trying a separation ?

All life is a compromise—a balance of difficulties—a choice between ills of different magnitudes.

One night of suffering gives us courage for the dentist's chair and pincers, or ugly-looking boot-hook. Months of protracted agony at length prepare the crippled patient—his views and feelings all insensibly changed and undermined—to part from his ulcered or mutilated limb.

Even so the once innocent, affectionate, and guileless Willie, while suggesting hopes and feelings all of the most pleasing kind, had been nearest and dearest to the mother's heart ; but,

now, day by day, distracting fears and apprehensions of debts and difficulties, of importunities quite impossible to grant, and of sullen looks where all once beamed with happiness and love—all this had revealed the painful truth that the darling Willie of infancy and childhood was already gone, and that every day those endearing looks and pretty ways were being replaced by wilful and headstrong habits, which the mother could ill endure coolly to sit down and contemplate.

There is a certain fortitude and resignation that arises from a sense of necessity, and this sense was gradually steeling the heart of Minnie to endure a separation from her own dear son.

Still, it was, indeed, a trying hour when poor Minnie at last was conscious that the cadetship was now granted—the outfit and passage all secured—and that it only remained to bid farewell to Willie—to risk the trying climate of India, “over seas and far away”—separated by time and space so distracting to think of, that it seemed as if she must part, and part for ever!

We cannot describe this cruel parting. We would hardly trust ourselves to compare the discipline—there had been none!—or the training of the boy with the duties that awaited to try his powers as a man.

Still, every man of experience must have observed, that if, on the one hand, the race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong; so, on the other hand, there seems to be some merciful counteraction, which—like the Providence supposed to watch over drunken men—almost raises a protecting arm over spoilt children, and forbids parental folly to be followed by all the heavy load of mischief it seems wilfully to design.

Unfortunately, Willie's chance seemed worse than that of the majority of indulged and humoured boys. There had been a little care and a little sense in his bringing up, but not enough. There had been some method in the madness, yet little akin to sound reason.

Now, we have always observed that a youth whose father is quite a fool, does better than a youth whose father may be characterised as half-and-half. Indeed, some of the sharpest lads we ever knew were of the former kind—for they soon learnt to shelve the Father altogether; and to take care of themselves.

CHAPTER VIII.

HOW NOBODY CAN BE TRULY SAID TO BE—"NOBODY'S ENEMY BUT HIS OWN."

THERE is a common expression—founded, indeed, on a very slender knowledge of all the subtle links that bind man to man in the economy of the Most High—that a certain person is nobody's enemy but his own.

This is a saying which can never be true.

Try it with the soldier, too sottish for his duty; try it with the madman, who fires his own house in a street; or take the case of the reprobate, whose words are firebrands, and who poisons by his example!

But, in no instance is this saying farther from the truth than in the cases to which it is most commonly applied—in the instance of the prodigal, who runs through his income at the peril of the poor labourer, who barter his strength for his bread; or, more frequently, at the peril of the striving, struggling shopkeeper

—the most severely tried and overwrought class, of any—whose life is one of worry and of weariness, of sinking heart and fretted brain.

—— "A very good sort of man is Mr. Langley: he is nobody's enemy but his own."

This was now quite a common remark in Brendon, of our once easy, affluent, and light-hearted friend Tom!

If we enter a little into the cottage-life of Brendon, we shall be able to judge how far this was true.

But let us first observe, that our friend was only one of a class. The struggle between those who, on the one hand, aptly represented the Three-and-a-quarter per Cents *reduced*; and, on the other hand, the Hollands and the Williamsons, who had grown rich upon twenty per cent in spirits or in cotton—this beggar-my-neighbour game had long been played, more or less, by the Armstrongs and the Lancasters, and by others of the good old families around; whose admirers, no doubt, were also in the habit of declaring that they were "nobody's enemy but their own," either. Of the propriety of this remark we shall be able to appreciate by entering into

"The short and simple annals of the poor."

Mrs. Holland was not allowed to live many days in ignorance of the stinging designation of Gottingen Hall, as applied invidiously to her fine new mansion. The most sensitive part of every man is his "consequence;" which, once wounded, was never known to heal; and every enemy so made becomes a Detective in plain clothes. We may, therefore, understand, that it afforded no small satisfaction to Mrs. Holland, whenever she found an opportunity of retaliating on that part of the Brendon Society, designated in her vocabulary as the Grandees, the Great Bashaws, or, sometimes, as the Stuck-ups; from one of which much-envied class she did not doubt that the Gottingen appellation must have come.

Many little occurrences, put together, had about this time tended to show that in the Langley escutcheon a certain blot was spreading wider and wider, which eventually suggested rather an uncomplimentary name for Langley Hall.

For instance, one day Mr. Holland's gardener came to him with a particular request that part of his wages should be paid the day before it was due.

Mr. Holland remarked that, generally, the trouble was to make the man come for his wages

at all. What, then, had happened to make him short of money?

"Please, sir," said gardener, "my daughter here"—pointing to a pale girl, of about eighteen years of age, who looked as if every drop of blood had been seamed and gusseted out of her care-worn cheeks—"please, sir, she is a dress-maker, in a small way. She makes for the '*gentry*,' sir; and she has left a frock at Mrs. Langley's, that's seven and sixpence; and the day before she left a gown at Mrs. Armstrong's, that is twelve shillings more; ——"

"And you mean to say," continued his master, most indignantly, "that the poor girl cannot get her money?"

"No, sir; not exactly that, sir; all is quite honourable like: only my daughter is afraid to offend. The gentry don't like people to be troublesome; so ——"

"So, she leaves the work, I suppose, and knows by the servant's look whether it is a hard-up family or not—eh?"

"Please, sir, that's just it," said this martyr to needles and thread. "My hours are from six in the morning to eight or nine in the evening sometimes; and getting the money is as much worry as the work, very often. We all know the sort of family we serve, sir. Some are

very good ; and they will quite scold you if you do not wait for your money, to save trouble another day. We can tell them the first time. The '*Readies*' is what we call them, sir."

" Yes, sir," added gardener ; " and some of the gentry owe everybody, till their heart is sick from waiting for their own ; and these are known as the '*Call-agains*.' "

Meanwhile, Mrs. Holland, who had been standing by, was feeling for her purse, to advance the money till such time as the Langleys and Armstrongs had paid, as she said, " for their gowns and petticoats." She was a good-hearted old soul was Mrs. Holland ; but, perhaps, there was a slight dash of alloy in this particular act of charity.

" What !" said her husband, " do people, positively calling themselves ladies and gentlemen, expose themselves in this way—open and patent even to the understanding of poor village girls ? "

" Believe me, sir, this is true," said gardener. " Now you, sir, and the Rector—a nice gentleman as any he is, sir—and Mr. Frederick Audrey, as well as the old gentleman, besides Mr. Williamson, and three or four of the old families—you are all Readies—you are, sir. Everybody who has to do with money and

wages knows that; but then there is Squire Lancaster's family—they have always been Call-agains; and, latterly, there is Squire Langley's—they used to be the best of the Readies, and the most easy sort of gentlefolk to work for; but they have dropped down among the Call-agains very much lately, they have, sir."

Mr. Holland was too much a man of the world not to know the difficulties to which persons, apparently men of good fortune, are often reduced: still, the idea of a poor girl being kept out of the money to buy her Sunday's dinner was quite a new form of credit, especially to one used only to large mercantile transactions; neither could he help turning to Mrs. Holland, and expressing his contempt for persons who allowed themselves to be classed among the mean and shabby, transparent in their hollow pretences even to the simple village workwoman.

The consequence of this discovery was that there issued from Gottingen Palace two new titles, or patents of honour. The one was "the Hardups of Hardup Hall," by which Mrs. Holland meant to depreciate the taste and elegance of Mrs. Langley's much-envied drawing-room; the other was the ancient race of the "O'Calagans" (*Oh! call again*), which last term the old lady reserved for general application,

according as certain persons allowed her to feel more or less at home in her late-in-life county position.

Mr. Holland, shortly after, had some conversation on this subject with our friend the Rector.

Mr. Holland. "The poor girl, believe me, was quite pale with fretting. Gardener said she had not slept for thinking of her little pittance, so thoughtlessly withheld."

Rector. "And suppose you did the same with your gardener; and suppose that he could not pay John Dawson the chandler, and then John Dawson could not pay Betty Lane his charwoman, poor old soul! My good, sir, I have, for many a long year, traced through all its vicious courses and cruel effects this subtle poison, speciously called *credit*. It is a noxious compound of fraud and folly, fretting the heart by night of those sons and daughters of hard labour and hard living, who have more, far more, than we can conceive, to wear and waste their strength by day."

Mr. Holland. "Credit in trade is quite another thing. But, with safe and certain incomes, really I did not expect to hear such things."

Rector. "But these cases are painfully fami-

liar to me. I am sorry to hear the Langleys mentioned so slightly. They are kind-hearted people. Mrs. Langley is always ready to assist me in any case of poverty and sickness. But—but they have been sadly tried lately—too full of difficulties, I fear, to reflect on the nicer points of equity and lovingkindness; and, unhappily, most true is it that—

‘Ill is wrought
For want of thought,
As well as want of heart.’”

The Rector walked away, musing and melancholy. He had a great regard for both Tom and Minnie. Minnie he regarded almost as a daughter. He knew the real kindness of her heart. The poor needlewoman had observed that she never remained an hour to work for Mrs. Langley without something to eat and drink; but money was altogether different. No; Minnie was so thoughtful about all poor people; she felt that they always must be the better for a good meal, whatever the time of day; and now the Rector saw one more sad instance in which fair fame is sullied and even kindly feeling loses half its sphere of action, all from that so truly called the *res angusta*: by which Horace means, not making both ends meet.

The Rector lamented this state of things all the more, because his feelings and associations, and, we may say, his instincts, were all on the side of the old families. The Hollands and their party he honoured and respected, but it was only by a kind of hard logical process. He had a "distant" respect for them. He regarded them as a good, useful, hard-working class, the very backbone of the nation; but then he felt that there was nothing very beautiful in the said backbone—nothing poetical—nothing romantic—and, in short, he said, almost aloud, "There's nothing chivalrous."

Chivalrous! The very sound alarmed and startled him into sense. "How are the mighty fallen!" Where now is the feudal castle and baronial hall, described so enthusiastically by Sir Walter Scott,—

"Which oft rolled back the tide of war,
But never closed its iron door
Against the desolate and poor?"

Ay, where, indeed? Full well the good Rector knew where they ought to be. He knew how "the fine old English gentleman, all of the olden time," inherited much of the same power and spirit to command as the baron of old—much of the same generous feeling to protect

his humble neighbours. He also knew how the same spirit, in a more enlightened and Christian form, was still preserved, an ever-active principle of good, in some of the yet remaining county families.

But, unhappily, it was only *some* : difficulties had increased—the moth of mortgage had eaten into the rent-roll—the gushing stream from the pure fountain of charity froze in icicles beneath chill penury's nipping blast. The free and open-hearted Tom Langley even had already become cowed and quiet, and could not half look his neighbour in the face. “*Tune liber?*” Horace would say. Do you call yourself independent and a gentleman? Why, a debtor is a slave, and so long as you owe a man money he has his foot upon your neck. Therefore it was that every parish subscription had been growing less and less—that every good work was harder to originate, and harder afterwards to support ; and, in short, the spirit of charity, as of chivalry, had well-nigh taken to itself wings and flown away !

The parson, the doctor, the lawyer, and the banker could write the history of any country neighbourhood. The o'erfraught heart will break unless it whisper its sorrows to some one, and these professional gentlemen serve respectively like the hole which, as in ancient fable,

Mrs. Midas dug in the garden, and then told her unpleasant discovery about her husband's ears. Philosophically we may regard these gentlemen as the necessary safety-valves, and as the fathers-confessor of the Protestant Church.

So, in the way of finding some one to share and to sympathise in his feelings of disappointment and regret, the Rector had a little conversation with Fred Audrey.

"And your surprise is," said the lawyer, "that the solvency and character of the most fashionable ladies and gentlemen of 'high degree,' and of 'unsullied honour,' should be so easily and so generally known! The truth is, the lower classes know it before the higher. You remember when Mr. Langley married old Chester's daughter?"

"Remember it? I do, indeed. I officiated, and made a speech at the breakfast—all from Gunter's. Pine-apples, grapes, peaches, and every extravagance out of season you can conceive. Really, knowing, or at least guessing very shrewdly, as I did, a thought came across me, and I hardly felt honest as I was eating my slice of pine-apple!"

Audrey. "Then, while all this profusion was going on within-doors, the very servants were canvassing the Chester solvency without; and

one tradesman called it a mere flicker and flash in the pan, and spoke indignantly, as if they were spending his money."

Rector. "Then you are quite prepared to find that the neighbours, both high and low, foresee any coming storm?"

Audrey. "There are many ways of learning these things, as men in my profession are well aware. I know you are anxious, as I am, about my friend Langley. Nothing, I fear, will stop him. But—but—in his case there is, however——. I cannot explain. Honour forbids."

Rector. "But you were saying that there are strange ways of learning these things."

Audrey. "Why, first of all, there is a kind of freemasonry among tradesmen, and I know that last week they compared their books, and overhauled and freely discussed Langley, and Armstrong, and Lancaster, over a friendly glass, and ended by agreeing that the custom of not one of the three was much worth having; long credit pared off all the profit from their bill. Again: tradesmen want credit and accommodation on the faith of book-debts, either with their wholesale dealer or at the bank. Here, again, a highly-respectable gentleman, to whom all touch their hats and pay every deference on the bench of magistrates in the county town, would, indeed,

have his eyes opened if he could but hear how his fair fame and his solvency is turned inside out, and unceremoniously bandied about in the most contemptuous way, by a set of men whom he would scarcely honour by a look."

Rector. "And what is your opinion of the solvency of Brendon?"

Audrey. "The rich traders—the Hollands, Williamsons, and others—only live as they can afford; but at least one-half the old families are going too fast. They are screwed up to the highest point, living always on the strain, with no ease or happiness; not a penny to help themselves with, and ashamed to look their banker or their tradespeople honestly in the face."

Rector. "I am sorry to say the doctor of the place bears witness with the lawyer in this respect."

Audrey. "Why, what says our friend Balford?"

Rector. "He declares things have come to such a pass, that unless he kill his patient he can hardly get his bill. The executors must pay, but the living man won't. Add to this, he says that he not only doctors the Armstrongs gratis, but actually gives change out of nothing! for the maid comes for money for the bottles, though the master never pays the bill! So

much for the ancient race of the O'Calagans, and the noble proprietors of our Hard-up Halls !”

Audrey (laughing). “ Well, well, this is very bad. What a rotten state of society this does bespeak !”

Rector. “ Rotten and mendacious, indeed ! One day, when you are in my study, you shall see the frontispiece of Erasmus. A man holds up a globe, taps it with his finger, and says ‘ *Tinnit ! Inane est !*—It is all hollow !’ ”

CHAPTER IX.

HOW THE RECTOR'S SERMON SEEMS TO BE INTENDED
SPECIALLY FOR THE LANGLEYS.

IT was now Christmas-day, and Tom and Minnie were by no means satisfied with themselves, or easy in their mind, as the Rector's sermon was so plainly applicable to their case that it positively condensed and fixed their thoughts in words, and held up a mirror in which they saw themselves.

First, he spoke of Christmas — “yes, happy Christmas,” said the Rector, “and where true Christian feeling runs like one golden thread through all the varied scenes of life—a happy anniversary, no doubt, it is;” but — “no man who knows the ways of this world, and all the convulsive throes and efforts of his toiling and deluded fellow-creatures, can think, without pain, of the baffled hopes and staring ruin of many a parent, seemingly as affluent as any one here present——”

Tom looked up most attentively, as if every word was going to his very soul.

“——that makes him turn instinctively away, loathing the sight of his children’s mirth, hollow and short-lived as he feels that mirth must be.”

Tom began to think, Who could have told him?—he was painting his heart’s “interior” to the very life.

Then the Rector continued: “Now is the great day of this world’s reckoning—now every smaller error of the year is held up—‘marked and quoted and written in a book’—and held up, nay, thrust upon us——”

Tom thought of his bills and banker’s book.

“——most ominously, most instructively in one fearful total of cumulative loss.”

Of course this led him to speak of a great day of final account, and then, as he was proceeding to the lesson to be read, from the manger of Bethlehem, Tom thought that all that applied to him was pretty well over: but not so, it was yet to come.

“Now,” he said, “my dear friends”—at the same time looking at them all around, fully and heartily in the face, and holding himself up positively like a live, un-stuffed man—“if an herald of mercy came from heaven to earth, teaching a new law, a new virtue, a new rule for

happiness even in this life—I say, one really new to the world as regards plain words, though shadowed forth perhaps, and yearning from the hearts or superstitions of all men—surely we should all be very eager to know what that one great rule really was.”

Everybody now was looking up—what could it be?

Was it charity? thought old Pegsworth, who “hadn’t subscribed to the ‘coals,’” and “didn’t approve of the ‘blankets.’”

Was it honesty? thought Hannah Billings of the chandler’s shop, lately fined for filing her weights and false-bottoming her quartern measure.

“No, it was humility. ‘The meek shall inherit the earth,’ shall have a larger share than they would otherwise have even of this world’s blessings. This was the great rule of life. To know ourselves—to know our proper level and proper place—not to force ourselves dangerously and uncomfortably high on the ladder of life, but holding this world’s grandeur at its proper price.

“‘Wherefore art thou sorrowful, O my soul? and why art thou so disquieted within me?’

“Let any man put to himself this question, and the answer will too often be found in that

false pride — that fret and fever to be first and foremost in a foolish race for honour and for fashion — to win the smiles of the little 'great,' and to hold our place just one step higher, by one life-long lie and affectation, than it has pleased God to call us to.

"Hence what painful jealousies — what gnawing heartburnings — what endless disappointments arise from this worldly spirit! Hence a 'worrying,' wearing, and one life-long struggle. Hence splendid misery — not a penny to spend on our better feelings — being straitened in the midst of riches — our hired servants have enough and to spare, and we almost perish with hunger! Hence debts and difficulties: the workman and his starving family sighing for their own, as it is beautifully expressed: 'For he is poor and setteth his heart upon it.' Hence daily temptations to every kind of meanness, our principles submitted to a strain which mortal weakness was never meant to bear. Hence soured tempers, household misery, truth, justice, and lovingkindness banished from what once was a noble and a generous heart — all, all from want of humility — all, all from aiming too high — all, in short, from living ——"

At agony point! mentally ejaculated Minnie.

"—— falsely and pretentiously, instead of

following the calm, sequestered paths of humility and truth."

The first moment Tom found himself alone, his reflections were much like these :

" Well now, indeed, I have *done it!* If before I was smarting from the effect, now I *am*, indeed, sensible of the cause.

' Farewell—a long farewell to all my greatness.' "

" The Rector at last has sung the Requiem, and pronounced a funeral oration over its grave."

" I must do it — I must stir up courage—the time is come — but I'll put it off till to-morrow ; and then — and then Minnie must hear it all ! "

The Rector's sermon made a deep impression. It came at a time when a new batch of Christmas bills compelled Tom to make another draw upon the Consols. And next to the steady, stealthy march of time, nothing gives the idea of the stern and inexorable more than the certain ratio in which an income decreases with the waste of capital.

However, Willie was now off his hands, and the case was not so very urgent but he might take a little time to consider before he risked unpleasant observations, by putting down any part of his establishment.

He was the more disposed to indulge him-

self so far, because just at this time circumstances combined to make him more and more sanguine of balancing his farming losses by some speculative venture of the kind we have heard recommended by Sir Edward Alex. But more of this in another chapter.

CHAPTER X.

HOW EVERYBODY IS GOING TO MAKE A FORTUNE
IN NO TIME—TOM LANGLEY INCLUDED.

HONOUR and a sense of greatness is so pleasing to little minds, so strong their appetite and so keen the scent, that they will extract it out of anything. Chemistry will produce sugar from old rags—vanity will extract its favourite sweets from things almost as unpromising.

Mrs. Williams was a person in whom this faculty was remarkably strong. Mrs. Williams was Sir Edward's landlady; she was not a little proud of the honour of letting her apartments to a Baronet; and, we fear, she was not a little sorry that her envious neighbours could, if they only knew it, take a little exception to the honour of entertaining poor Bella.

And now Mrs. Williams is in her glory. Carriages with coronets, and the most fashionable equipages in London, are thronging Queen

Street, taking up and setting down, and that at all hours of the day; and nearly all are stopping at Mrs. Williams's door.

Such greatness! such grandeur! such titled company! What can it all mean?

This was at once the pride and the puzzle of Mrs. Williams, and also the wonder and the envy of all the friends and acquaintance of Mrs. Williams, and perhaps of other proprietors of furnished apartments in May Fair.

One point was very clear: namely, that Sir Edward Alex, run after as he was by every one, courted by titled ladies as well as lords, was a great man—indeed, a very great man—a man of “honour and renown,” almost unrivalled “in famous London town.”

But now for the explanation of all this:—

Live by labour is the law.

Human nature says, We won't.

The voice of Providence says, You shall.

Human nature, waiting some wonderfully tempting crisis, exclaims, Now's the time to try it!

Those wise in the ways of Providence reply, “Try it, if you will. Each generation must have a try for itself. But we shall soon see what will come of it.”

It was just such a crisis at the time of which

we speak. It was the time of the great Railway Mania.

A new generation of minors had come into their fortune—a new class of working men had made money to play ducks-and-drakes with—a new set of fools had yet to be accommodated by a new set of knaves; and all the great lessons periodically taught, from the South-Sea Bubble to the Milk and Washing Companies, were to them only dry rules in the grammar of life, which, if known by rote, they had yet to learn to realise and to apply.

And now, how truly tempting was the vision! There was already one line of railway from London to Liverpool, and another line from London to Bristol; so that, on one or the other, nearly all England must have had a ride, talking all the while of the great good fortune of the shareholders—for, every thousand had turned at least into two, and full eight per cent was received for their money!

Little did these sanguine admirers of the railway system, and these envious calculators, at that time suspect—though some few who did so were scoffed at as ill-natured and as simpletons—that a cold jet of truth would one day cause these bladders to collapse into woefully small dimensions.

Founded chiefly on these two great instances of railway success, an opinion more and more widely prevailed that every railway would be a mine of wealth, and, since the good things in the old lines were all monopolised, the shortest way was to start other schemes as good: men would then have the shares at the first price, and all the golden harvest would be their own.

Accordingly, one railway after another was projected, and the state of the money market seemed to justify the most sanguine anticipations: the shares ran up to so high a price, that every man you met had a tale to tell of a fortune made almost in a day.

John Toll, of our acquaintance, had stitched away, making and mending shoes for ten years, to save five hundred pounds, and then proclaimed that the five hundred shot up into a thousand all in one month—but only, unhappily, to teach extravagance and lead him on to more railway ventures, with ruin in the end. And so on, all over the country, we heard the same.

Mr. Timmins, the busiest and the most enterprising of all the Dissenters in Arminster, was a stationer. He would not sell a pack of cards for conscience' sake; still, printing week-days and preaching Sundays, he added

one more department to his little establishment; and behold Mr. Timmins appears as the Arminster stockbroker, and lists of shares, like betting-lists, appeared to set forth every new scheme, and to exhibit stock-jobbing made easy to elderly ladies, who had scarcely heard of anything but the funds; as also to simple shopkeepers, to whom "Scrip" and "Allotments" were words of an unknown tongue.

Sir Edward Alex, like other needy and not over-scrupulous men, now saw, or thought he saw, a fine opening for a sudden fortune. He became an active member of committees without number. His name looked grand on a prospectus, and a name "with a good handle to it," in the current expression of the day, was worth no little, to serve as a decoy to the unwary (—indeed, there was one man who received a thousand pounds for the loan of his name, whether the scheme came into operation or not!)

In a very short time Sir Edward found himself in a high and commanding position. Shares by thousands were at his disposal: while lords and ladies courted him with flattery the most idolising and obsequiousness the most profound. Indeed, men of all stations "trembled at his nod," because the much-coveted shares were scarce—the geese came by flocks

too many for the meal; and on his "nod" of assent it depended whether they should be fed to their hearts' content, or sent empty and cackling away.

Little did the silly creatures know the mighty engine that Sir Edward at the same time worked: for, that, if the said shares proved worth having, he could allot them to himself: if the shares dropped down to a discount, he could say, "Come, take what you asked for," and so throw the loss upon them!

Of course, to buy shares in open market was no bargain; but to get them at par, by the influence of Sir Edward, seemed like receiving for hundreds what turned to thousands in their hands.

Sir Edward's influence stopped not here. No limited monarchy was his. He became a financial authority, and adviser in general on all kinds of investments. One elderly lady bought shares one day at a high price, on the valued advice of Sir Edward, and by the same valued advice—most grateful at being saved from ruin by his "earliest information"—she shortly after sold the same, at no little discount, to another favoured, humble, and most submissive friend of Sir Edward—to goose the second, to be plucked in the same way as goose the first!

The truth was, people would be fools, and

would tempt Sir Edward to be a knave—they almost asked to be robbed; and who was ever refused such a request?—They richly deserved to be fleeced, and, in this way, men are not often allowed to come short of their deserts.

All England caught the fever. Nothing is so exciting as a rush and a scramble for gold. No one would believe it, till he has once been drawn within the whirl of its magic influence, how truly distracting—how subversive of the calm and quiet feelings of his better nature—it is to be offered the chance of sudden riches.

Only let a will be read, and “When the pie is opened, how the birds begin to sing!” Even ladies become lawyers, lynx-eyed to the full measure of their rights. Some stupid old boy brightens up as keen as a Chancellor; then comes the quarrel,—then comes the scramble,—then the dull, the heavy, the sleepy-looking dogs in the human kennel, at the very sight of that everlasting bone of this world’s contentions, snap and snarl, and show the latent devilry of their thinly-veneered and French-polished nature.

The effect was wonderful in many ways: prudent men became prodigal; easy-going people first learnt discontent. When so much seems going for the asking, they thought, Surely we may as well come in for a share!

Tom Langley, we remember, at one time would not hear of any speculations, but now he could talk of nothing else. He had no unfair intentions. Capital was wanted for new railways; he had a perfect right to advance his. Now was his time to make use of his old acquaintance and obtain a priority in some first-rate investment.

Tom was the more interested in railways, because about this time many a person of his acquaintance seemed to be all of a sudden "a very prosperous gentleman," all by help of the railways.

There was his friend Augustus Wainwright, many years the plague of the house—the family blister—the poor relation—a standing "caution" to mammas and daughters, long arrived at years of discretion, without much discretion having made its appearance—'Gustus was now magnanimous, and came down to Arminster with a new theodolite, with brass enough to astonish the people; indeed certain of them were afraid it would go off and shoot somebody. 'Gustus could boast of a high salary, being one of the engineers of the new railways projected in these parts.

"Then you have found something to do at last, 'Gustus?" said Langley.

"Oh! yes. I paid five pounds to learn my

profession, with a small discount in the shape of cigars at all times, and a supper to start with, to the engineering staff, to induce them to put up with my blunders at the first go off; and now, after a month at it, here I am, and have just taken a pupil to teach the same profitable line of business. You know Henry Hall?"

"Perfectly well."

"Harry's not at all a bad fellow to work, but all he can do is to carry *one* end of the chain. But did you see that man sitting on the heap of stones, smoking his pipe, with a book and pencil in his hand?"

"Certainly I did. The man you mean is old Mrs. Castle's ne'er-do-well son, Jerry."

"Well, I've put Jerry into a good thing—and an uncommonly good thing, too."

"Then I suppose he is to carry the *other* end of the chain?"

"Oh, no; that's too fatiguing. I have chalked out for Jerry something much better than that. For, I fell in with Jerry the other day, and heard him deploring his stupid, penniless existence—'No change; no fun; no nothing;' when I said, 'Would a lark in town, at the expense of the new railway, suit you?' 'Nothing better,' said Jerry. 'Then,' I said, 'I'll speak to our people, and you shall be 'traffic-

taker.' All you have to do is, to sit down there and count all that passes along the road, and you shall be witness in committee, at some guineas a-day all the time you are in London.'"

"Really," said Tom, "such a fellow as Jerry might sleep over his pipe—nothing more likely. Really, you can't trust to his computations."

"Never mind that: if he does not find traffic enough, our people know how to add it up for him. Great tact is required to make a case for parliament, I can assure you."

One would suppose that this was not the way to recommend railways to Tom Langley, but much older men than Tom, in those days, shut their eyes to those things, and even enjoyed the joke, and ventured their money after all.

The same evening, Tom being late in Arminster, looked into the club-room of the Chapter Inn, and as soon as he was able to see for the cloud of smoke, there he found all his railway friends together, 'Gustus, Jerry, and all, who, like others in those money-making times, were spending their profits before they earned them. All seemed as jolly and happy as if it were the golden age, and not the iron one, that had now set in.

This jovial rendezvous for the smokers of cigars and the imbibers of brandy and water was

more than ever frequented about this time, so eager was every one to hear of railway doings; and the worse their trade, the greater their disposition to try their luck; and little indeed did they think about spending their shillings while golden visions were glittering before their sanguine and creative imaginations.

Harry Hall, very much elevated, and flushed in the face, rose to give Tom an uproarious greeting,—not altogether what the Squire of Langley Hall desired in that kind of small-town company.

Harry wanted to remind Tom of the elegant home his mother still kept for him at Cheltenham, with full command of society and amusements of all kinds, changing with the changes of the season, both in the ball-room and the field; and this he intended for the general edification of the young clerks and townsmen of Arminster there assembled.

“And now, gentlemen,” said Harry, rising on his legs, “since Mr. Langley is here, and can bear witness to what I say, I’ll read you what I call a great moral lesson.”

This was received with, “Well done, well done!”—“Hear him!”—“Mr. Hall’s speech!”—“Mr. Hall!”—Cries which, with ringing of glasses, were heard on all sides, while Jerry

called out, quoting Mr. Squeers, "Now for this great moral lesson! yes, 'ours is the shop for morals.'"

"Now, first of all, gentlemen," said Harry Hall, "you have heard what I said about the way I can live, and have lived 'till I am sick and tired of it, when at home."

"You mean to say you've the best to eat and to drink, and plenty of it, money to spend, and nothing to do?" suggested Jerry; adding, "If that is not being pretty well up in the world, I should like some moral lesson to teach us what is!"

"That's just all about it," continued Harry; "you've described it exactly. Now, that is exactly the good thing I have left: and I'll tell you now what I have taken instead—what I am come down to; and that of my own free choice and preference, and what I find a better thing of the two, by a great deal."

"Now for it!"—"Out with it!" cried Jerry.

"Why, a railway labourer at twenty shillings a-week—about enough to find me in cigars and brandy and water. Now, only ask my master here," slapping 'Gustus on the back, "if that is not true, every word of it."

"Yes," said 'Gustus, "the hardest of all work is doing nothing—so Harry has found it; and

all he does is to carry one end of the chain, while the farmer's man, exercising quite as much engineering science, carries the other."

This moral lesson was received with comments various. "Doing nothing" was by no means an untried experiment to Jerry; still, he thought that want of money to keep him going made all the difference.

Not long after Tom saw the pantomime of Rasselas and the Happy Valley, and heard some fat, sunny fellows, in a blaze of fairy scenery, implore on their bended knees to be let out. They said they were "so horribly happy," anything else, if it were but a twinge of pain, would be a luxury to them. At once Tom thought of the experience of Harry Hall—preferring the healthy toil of a labourer to the listless apathy of the gentleman. We may add, that had Tom Langley possessed the Rector's philosophy he might have reflected that one kind of good resulting from evil, as connected with those periodical fevers of speculation is, that they supply that desiderated twinge aforesaid, and throw many a Harry Hall, not by choice, but by necessity, on his own healthful resources.

Alas! poor Harry! Had he only hung on to the chain—or had there long remained any chains for such men to hang on to—all might

have been well. But, alas! the sequel of the story is, indeed, a sorry one. He returned to Cheltenham. A life all pleasure once more proved an hourly torture—a life all leisure proved the heaviest of burthens; and Harry was afflicted with a morbid melancholy—his mind became one “chamber of horrors,” and these he sought by liquor to dispel. After two years he died of *delirium tremens*.

When sufficient time had passed for Tom Langley to take the said railway fever, both “by infection” and also “in the natural way,” Sir Edward Alex was at about the zenith of his fame, and the crisis of his great financial powers; and as the new Arminster branch required some man of local knowledge and influence on the Committee, Sir Edward addressed Tom, and proposed that he should allow himself to be nominated as one of the Arminster Board. At the same time, as a Parliamentary Committee was then about to sit to receive evidence as to the merits of the line, Tom received a letter from the solicitor to ask him to come up as a witness to points obviously within his local knowledge and experience.

Tom was considerably elated with the pleasing variety and recreation which was evidently in store for him, neither was he indifferent to the

brightness of his future prospects. It really seemed as if now there was an opportunity for a little money to be made—the balance which had been year after year against him, might now be adjusted; and he could almost imagine the old banker smiling in sympathy as he handed him his account. In short, Tom felt so far cheered and comfortable, that he became less careful of his money at the very thoughts of it.

There is something in the very atmosphere of speculation that always makes a man in a hurry to realize and anticipate his winnings. So, Sophy and Julia were quite surprised at the change. Sophy used often to laugh and say, “Whatever we talk about to papa, it is always ‘I can’t afford it!’” but now they were charmed at the pretty things he volunteered to bring them back from London.

Arrived in London, Tom was not disappointed. A complete El-Dorado was before him. The Arminster witnesses—one batch of about twenty—were all appointed to meet at Morley’s Hotel, and the solicitor was to provide and pay for everything.

Whether rich or poor, men rarely enjoy living at an hotel half as much as when they have no bill in the background to take the taste out of everything.

Every day, meals at a common table were set forth, and all in the most expensive style, as if intended duly to represent the grandeur and the prosperity of the Arminster line.

The conversation was at once exciting and edifying. It seemed as if no one who speculated in railways ever lost. Tom did not reflect that those who had nothing to boast, had nothing to tell. Still, to breathe a clime so rich and genial, and only to hear of streams of gold, and crops returning an hundred-fold—this is a kind of influence sure to produce an effect on any but the most dull and phlegmatic natures ; more especially will it operate when a man has a growing family and a fast-decreasing income.

As Tom began to look abroad, and walked from Charing Cross down to the House of Commons, all that broad street was one scene of cabs, all going the excited and the railway pace of the clerks, witnesses, engineers, and other officials, who filled them. "There," said one of the party who had been longest in town—"there's a scene to contemplate! There is scarcely a man in those helter-skelter cabs but is upon railway business—all eating and drinking at some company's expense, and drawing on an average two guineas a-day!"

Some one in the Committee-room remarked, —“Do you see that man with sharp features and a bald top to his head? A very sharp practitioner he is. He got up the ‘Great Un-necessary’ Railway—the drawings and levels, I suspect, are all imaginary—the names all men of straw; but all to make good for his office. This is quite a common dodge now-a-days. His name is Whetstone. He will make a Prospectus to show anything; and only tell him the dividend your company means to pay, and he is the man ‘to make things pleasant,’ and will square your balance-sheet to a penny!”

And now, from the Tuesday to the Friday, Tom Langley hung about the Committee-room, feeling as important as the rest, while watching the evidence in support, and the progress of the bill; and on Saturday, at dinner, the agent, who acted whipper-in and paymaster, said,—

“I have to submit that, to stay in London all Sunday will be insufferable for gentlemen in your rank in life ——”

By this, he meant an allusion to the law which allows witnesses to claim to eat, and drink, and live at the expense of the suit, in a style suitable to their several stations.

“—— and, therefore,” he continued, “I should propose to make arrangements for your

changing your quarters to Brighton from this evening till Monday morning."

This was received as the height of liberality as well as the perfection of good sense, inso-much so that one gentleman afterwards proposed their energetic and public-spirited agent's health—and to Brighton they did go.

Tom has often spoken in terms high and enthusiastic of the breakfast and champagne dinner at the Albion, as also of the yacht provided, likewise at the expense of the Company, "for such gentlemen as did not wish to go to church!"

It was not till they returned from Brighton that Sir Edward Alex had any time for more than a few hasty words with Tom Langley. Tom was now asked to live up to his country ways—that is, to rise with the lark—and come to an early breakfast. Nine o'clock in London is early indeed. Tom found that "rising with the lark," meant in London, coming down-stairs amidst brooms and brushes, mats standing up on end, unshorn men, and uncombed women. His walk to May Fair threatened a volume of dust over his feet at one door and a pail of water at another.

And, as Tom Langley walked along through the streets of London, he could not help com-

paring the present with the past. He could not but feel that to him London was no more what it once had been. The novelty, the excitement, the romance of fashion, all were gone. The young fellows whom he had seen the day before dashing about in Rotten Row, or lounging in the windows of the clubs, all looked like a thrice-told tale. He began to see, as with Nat Foster's eyes, their future in their present state ; and he could hardly help calculating that there were, probably, among these very young men, now so affluent and so thoughtless of the morrow, many a Grinfield, a Wragley, or a Harter, existing, perhaps, in the same proportion as his own former clique had supplied, and doomed, like them, to reap in shame and sorrow what now they were sowing in selfishness and sin.

And then Tom's thoughts soon wandered to his Julia and his Sophy, and what pretty things he should buy them—and how he wished the little dears were with him to enjoy the sight of all the bazaars, and shops, and carriages—ay, and above all, to see that which is actual fairyland to any country child—a pantomime, founded, perhaps, on some Arabian Night's tale, wherein the hero rides through the air on a winged dragon with a beautiful princess rescued from the castle of the fell enchanter—

with showers of gold and silver, bowers all roses, and dresses spangled with precious stones.

—Yes, Minnie too, he thought, has not for a long time had a holiday—my expenses are frightful, so I could not help it—but now, if I can but make a lucky hit, why, then, we will have one grand holiday in London, all together—pretty little dears! How Minnie would rejoice to see their young hearts swelling with excitement, and their eyes sparkling with delight!

While all these reflections were running through his mind, and raising within his breast a subdued and quiet thought of what he was, and what he might have been, and some sense of gratitude to think he had been snatched away from a mere life of idle delirium to a more improving sphere of action, Tom had approached Sir Edward's door.

Pale, wan, highly nervous and irritable, sat Sir Edward at the breakfast-table. Bella was reminding him for the hundredth time that he worked too hard—that his figures and his writing early and late, and exciting conversation all day long—that this was too much for his nerves. She then told Tom Langley that Sir Edward would be more quiet when he had had his breakfast.

This, thanks to some stimulant, proved to be the case ; and then a few minutes—only a few could be spared—were devoted to the purpose of Tom's visit. Some local attendance at Arminster, with a periodical run up to the London Board, Sir Edward explained, would be required by his new office as Committee-man : meanwhile, by correspondence Sir Edward would intimate some first-rate lines, as regarded a certain rise in the market, since Tom was disposed to invest. After a little animating and highly encouraging conversation of a more general kind, Sir Edward was called out to give audience, as by appointment, to other sanguine visitors, and Tom took leave of Sir Edward, and of Bella too.

Bella retained little of her former good looks. A life of irritation and disappointment, being sick at heart, and feeling as if all the world were against her—this is, indeed, enough to fret wrinkles in the fairest cheek, and banish all that serenity and composure, without which the most lovely of Eve's daughters lose all their powers to charm.

CHAPTER XI.

HOW THEY ARE ALL VERY HAPPY AT FIRST, BUT
FIND PAIN AND PLEASURE ARE NEVER LONG
AFTER EACH OTHER.

Now all is prosperous, all is happy at Langley Hall. Every servant within-doors, and every farmer without, is boasting of the great good fortune of Squire Langley. Under ordinary circumstances few gentlemen talk much about their own affairs: but these were no ordinary times. Days of general speculation are no days for secret or reserve, and everybody seemed to know when any one else had bought Great Congleton shares. Tom Langley had really a motive for speaking out: for, nettled at the thought of his character for shrewdness and good sense having been compromised by his losses in his amateur-farming experiments, he had a peculiar pleasure in alluding to what seemed so redeeming an investment as his ten thousand pounds in Great Congleton Stock.

Day after day, at Langley Hall, it was quite a treat to open the newspaper, to read—"Five pounds paid, and fifteen—seventeen—twenty pounds the market price!" "Hurrah!" said the happy man. His fortune seemed to grow, like a mushroom, in the night; and pen or pencil was for ever in his hand, as he calculated that his ten thousand pounds had already turned into fifteen, twenty, and at last into twenty-five thousand pounds!

"My dear Minnie," said her excited spouse, "I am positively nine thousand pounds richer than the happy day on which I wedded you."

It was very natural that Tom Langley should calculate after this manner. Almost every speculator does the same. Few consider that, till a man has positively left the gambling-table, and that never to return—till a man has sold his puffed and blown-up shares, and placed the money in some safe investment—it is rather too soon to talk about his winnings.

However, there is a very quaint proverb that says, "What's the odds whilst you're happy?" and very happy, indeed, were all the Langley party. Even the servants in the kitchen had had a treat when their master returned triumphantly from London, after the passing of the Great Congleton Railway Bill, and one of

the maids wanted to put one quarter's wages into "Great Congletons."

Minnie for the time thought her husband a very Rothschild; though, a transient thought did sweep across the mirror of her mind, and leave just a breath behind to cloud its perfect clearness. There was a certain puzzle about reaping where he had not sown; there was just that kind of notion about all not being quite right, which the ladies will take up without at all understanding the matter, and which the gentlemen try in vain, by ingenious reasoning, to argue them out of.

In reply, Tom told Minnie that fields and houses were often sold at a profit; so, why not find a bargain in railway shares? and Minnie, still conscious of the same inward sensation, said, what seemed so reasonable she hoped was also right.

Charlotte Mildmay was now on a visit. She entered freely into the happiness of the whole family: still, she also felt there was a something about it that she did not like. She hoped nobody ever lost to make Tom gain: she had also a superstition about it being in the very nature of things that the golden heaps should crumble down almost as rapidly as they had been piled up.

However, no such floating fancies—none of

these qualms and twinges, felt we cannot tell exactly where, are often allowed to interfere with anything so exulting as a man's sense of a sudden fortune for himself and family. Therefore, in the way of realising his good fortune, and striking the iron of prosperity while it was hot, it was soon arranged that when next Tom went to attend the London Board, Minnie and the two girls should go, too—take lodgings in Wimpole Street, and pass a fortnight in seeing all the sights, from the British Museum to the dome of St. Paul's, and from the Zoological Gardens to Greenwich Hospital.

All this was done. Sophy and Julia were in a perfect ecstasy at the very thought of going to London. Minnie was too old now to be in an ecstasy about anything. Yes, one thing would have thrilled her mother's soul with joy, indeed. Could we only have restored her own dear Willie safe and sound from India, then Minnie's heart would once more leap and bound with all the transport of these happy girls.

Indeed, Willie's absence was a great trial; more especially because, no sooner had he sailed — no sooner did the mother feel he was, perhaps for ever, parted from her by cruel seas, than all the trouble and anxiety that had latterly turned maternal pleasure into pain was gone

clean out of mind, and immediately quite another Willie—the Willie of childhood, loving, and endearing, and invested with all the winning ways she so fondly would recall to memory—once more formed the picture on which she doated, and gave an ideal value to her loss.

And now the father was so rich that, perhaps, if he had but known it sooner, her Willie might have found some employment nearer home!

This reflection Minnie ventured to express to Tom Langley.

“Well, well,” said he, “we will see what can be done. If all goes well, perhaps, after a little time, I may write to Willie to return, and then I may trust to what my present interest with men of all rank and station may do for him in England. Indeed, my dear, you can have no conception of the favours that are asked of me, and consequently the influence which is implied on my side, and that by men of the highest standing, ever since I have been one of the Congleton Committee.

This kind of promise cheered Minnie exceedingly; and Tom further resolved, that when next he wrote he would say enough to encourage the poor dear boy to bear patiently the separation for awhile, and to prepare him for the good

news that he might really take ship and return to England.

And this may be the proper place to mention that a letter to this effect the sanguine father did write some time after: and, as the sequel will show, few fond and foolish letters ever were attended with more grievous consequences.

Who can describe the delight of two lively and intelligent country young ladies for the first time in London? Sophy hoped she should see the Queen, and Julia, who was fond of riding, confessed, to Tom's great amusement, that she had almost as great a curiosity to see the Queen's horse. But both admitted they were more than gratified when, one fine summer's afternoon, Hyde Park being crowded with equipages, one outrider, in the royal livery, was seen in advance, and immediately, as if with one consent—the intuitive loyalty of a free people—every carriage drew aside, hats were quickly raised, and the Royal party passed on; and Sophy and Julia—looking with all their eyes, and being the most interesting and attractive of the little party in which they stood (perhaps from their happy country-look and eager curiosity)—really believed that they had a bow all to themselves!

As to sights, London streets and all that

there meets the eye are entertainment enough for a week at least, though of course they also saw more of the British Museum, the Colosseum, St. Paul's, and Westminster Abbey, in three days than most Londoners see in as many years. It was indeed curious to observe how such things as no Londoner would think of pointing out proved interesting to those country sight-seers.

"See, there," said Sophy, "is the veritable shop that Day and Martin's blacking comes from!"

"Yes," said Julia, whose curiosity was equally determined by what from childhood had caught her eye most frequently in the newspapers, "and papa has promised to point out to me Newgate, and the exact place where we read of the poor men being hung."

And thus, after about as many shops and sights, and plays and operas, had been seen as would be the amusement of many a long day to talk of and to digest — and after spending some handsome representations of their father's spendid gains in those most attractive shops, Minnie, as was natural from the even tenor of her days, felt more tired and exhausted, in spite of all their happy days and nights, than she had

been for many years, and was not sorry to return with her delighted daughters to Langley Hall.

"Hard-up Hall, indeed!" said Minnie, as she drove up to the door with the pretty things, so significant of her prosperity, lying in various parcels around her; "Hard-up Hall, indeed! No, no. Saucy enough it was, certainly, whoever said so. But—but—that appellation will 'now lose its point'—she might have said its *sting*—"I am thankful to say our losses are retrieved and those unpleasant days are past."

Tom Langley was now quite merry when he went to the bank: he actually began to joke with old Mr. Audrey, who, old as he was, could generally contrive to drive down and spend an hour or two in the bank parlour, just to hear how things went on.

This kind old gentleman, still looking on Tom as part and parcel of the child he once remembered, would affect to join in the joke when reminded of his own prudential maxims and ominous looks, and shrugs, and solemn warnings; but yet he always ended with one remark, which was this: "And now, Mr. Thomas" (he never could learn to call Langley by any other name), "when shall I have your instructions to turn it all into consols?"

"The shares will run up higher yet," was the reply.

"Yes; but they might go lower. I have lived through the days of the Mine-mania, the Canal-mania, the Doing-everything-by-Company-mania. Yes, and I suppose you have read about the South-Sea Bubble?"

"Yes."

"And about the Tulip-mania?"

"Tulip-mania? No."

"Why, you see, anything will serve for a mania when the world have used-their senses till they are sick of them and want a holiday. Above all, in these days, when there is so much paper afloat, that people grow mystified, and expect—instead of a certain guinea for a slow guinea's worth—to become rich by a mere hocus-pocus of printed paper."

"Well, but you spoke of a Tulip-mania?"

"There now! you young people don't read the good old books of my day, or you would have known all about the hundreds that were invested—to be turned, of course at once, into thousands—when there was a mere fleeting fashion for growing Dutch tulips. Why, you ought to know all about this. Does not Addison* describe the unhappy speculator whose

* Tatler, No. 218.

cook-maid mistook tulip-roots for onions, and made him a dish of pottage costing above a thousand pounds?"

Tom did not see the inference of that old man's rambling story.

"However, what I meant to point at is, that there was perhaps hardly one out of all the ruined men in those many national fits of temporary insanity but had at one time made a fortune, if he had only stopped while he was a winner."

Now in all this good advice the wise old ~~banker~~ hoped—but barely hoped—for any good result; so invariably had he observed that a successful speculator lives for the time in an ideal world of his own, and never sees things as they are.

Of all the dust to blind the eyes of mortal man there is no such dust as gold-dust.

Years after, when all this was talked over, Minnie said she really believed that the Rector sometimes preached—not at them; he knew the human heart and the secret of persuasiveness too well—but he was preaching and dropping the word in season, for Tom's especial benefit, in many a sermon at Brendon church.

If he had preached pointedly on gambling and speculation all eyes would have turned to the Langley pew: but no. At one time he spoke

of the sympathetic shudder that he could conceive running throughout all creation, at whatever disturbed the Divine economy, and jarred upon the harmonious chords of right.

At another time he enforced that, "though hand join in hand"—however great the "multitude to do evil"—however specious or puzzling the system or the series, yet could the judgments of the Most High electrically thread the tangled coil with a vital shock to each guilty heart.

And once more did the Rector enforce, that "Man's life consisteth not in such things as he doth possess." Coveted gold might be clutched, yet with palsied hand, the inner man perishing as the outer man prevailed—the wages of covetousness being simply this: the means at the expense of all genial feeling to enjoy—there being a way of apparently giving us our "hearts' desire," but withal sending "leanness into our souls."

Eight months had now passed away—Tom Langley was all the time full of his most important railway business at the weekly committee at Arminster, and a monthly appearance at the London Board. Contractors, engineers, landowners, and agents various, were at all hours coming to Langley Hall, and Tom had already fallen into the usual habit of reckoning all men

sensible and straightforward who favoured or fell in with the Arminster scheme, and all men narrow-minded and basely devoted to their own sordid interest who happened to oppose him in the works or to doubt about the pay.

Several letters had come from Willie, all showing the imperative necessity of more money. First of all, he had to travel up the country alone, five hundred miles, to join his regiment, without the usual economy of going in company with several other griffs, who would have divided those heavy expenses with him. Then, he had a Bungalow to build, and after that another horse to buy; all of which demands sent Tom about the country making numerous inquiries about the habits of the Indian army, and the practicability of an officer's living on his pay.

The worst of it was, that the affectionate and anxious mother must see the contents of every Indian letter. Indeed, whenever she espied one of those flimsy unsealed epistles, she was in a perfect fever before the wafer was broken, and very often in a cold shiver afterwards.

All this time matters had been going on serenely and quietly at Langley Hall—as much so as can ordinarily be the case with a grown-up family; when those who are present have fancies, foibles, affectations, ideas, and expectations in

the exact state of illusion which it has taken the parents twenty years to correct, modify, or to rub out of themselves—and when the one child who is absent ever determines the darker current of the mother's thoughts by day and the more fearful phantoms of her dreams by night.

At this time, the Great Congleton shares certainly were not as high as they had been : still, the profit in the investment remained considerable, and Tom never doubted but they would eventually—and, as he said, when the money market was a little easier—be up again at their highest price.

While the affairs and interests of the Langley family were in this position, Tom had just returned from his monthly attendance at the London Board, when, late one evening, a messenger came with an express from the secretary to the following effect :—

“Sir,—I am much pained to have to report to you that, from private information received, it has been ascertained that a cheque bearing your name, jointly with those of Sir Edward Alex and Mr. Medway, and to the amount of ten thousand pounds, was drawn, it is believed by Sir Edward Alex himself, the day after our last meeting.

"I trust I have done right in calling a meeting at once for the third inst. to receive explanations on this truly alarming discovery.

"Yours obediently,

"J. BULLER,

"Secretary to the Great Congleton
Railway Committee."

Tom was astounded, shocked, and intensely alarmed: the only cheque he had signed, he was well assured, was one in blank, and that payable to the secretary. How, then, unknown to the secretary, could there be a draft for ten thousand pounds?

Immediately he hurried off to Frederic Audrey, whom he found about to retire for the night.

To an experienced solicitor like Fred Audrey, the lateness of the hour — the trepidation of his client — the ominous name of railway, a matter in which he well knew Tom Langley was helpless as a child — and, above all, the name of Sir Edward Alex in sinister conjunction with some ten thousand pounds stolen or strayed — this was all so much fact conjuring up the most serious apprehensions into his mind.

As to the meaning of the letter, as also the robbery and the foolery that almost asked to be robbed, Fred Audrey was at no loss to make a

shrewd guess. But every question he asked, and every answer he elicited, only tended to show him the extent of his client's danger, and the extreme importance of prompt and judicious conduct.

Ten thousand pounds had been stolen by a cheque signed in part by Tom Langley! stolen, too, by Tom's intimate friend! How natural that persons should suspect collusion! How likely that Sir Edward should be tempted to screen himself at his friend's expense!

It was quite possible that the charge should be made publicly against both! and that Thomas Langley, Esq., of Langley Hall, however innocent, should, at all events, be arrested, and have to make his innocence clear, and that with appearances all against him, in open court!

All this glanced in a moment through Audrey's mind: though he had far too much good sense and feeling to cause unnecessary pain by hinting it. However, after a long and anxious consultation, it was arranged that both lawyer and client should start for London at an early hour on the following morning, in order to be in time for the special meeting; and thus to show a bold front, and to volunteer every possible explanation.

Tom determined not to say a word to Minnie. But silence was no easy matter. She

had watched his countenance as he read the letter: she wondered why he should trouble Audrey at such an hour. Tom tried evasive answers, but all would not do. He could not sleep—Minnie perceived that very soon. Tom lay as still as possible, to make her think he slept; but at last she said, "Now I know you are wide awake.—Something has happened—I must know what." The moment Tom had confessed, Minnie's fears were painfully excited; the use of Tom's name in a forgery or felony sounded full of unknown horrors.—Charlotte's warning, "I don't like that man at all," rang in her ears. Her own natural distrust—her wholesome superstition about sudden riches and speculation—all added to the dark cloud that brooded over her mind, and she suffered in their full intensity all the worst fears of Fred Audrey.

CHAPTER XII.

HOW SIR E. ALEX FINDS THAT NO MAN IN THE
PATHS OF EVIL CAN SAY, "SO FAR WILL I GO,
AND NO FARTHER."

THE mode of doing business in the Railway Committees may be easily supposed to be very much in character with the inexperienced, the self-important, and the most gullible class of men, who formed no small proportion of those who sat, vain as peacocks, in their first new "suit of little brief authority," at the respective Boards. "No red tape"—"no absurd formalities;" in other words, no check and no precautions—this Sir Edward soon taught Tom Langley, and men equally unacquainted with business, to vote the true secret of dispatch and the height of common sense.

To be fenced about with forms, and to be tied and bound in red tape, is all very easy to laugh at. But experience teaches that, if once you leave a standing blot, in course of time

some one is sure to hit it—and so it proved in the history of the Great Congleton Railway Committee; and that in the manner following:—

No cheque could be drawn unless signed by the names of three of the committee, at least. Had they kept to the spirit of this law all would have been safe: “but,” says Sir Edward, “this is practically very inconvenient; for, money is often wanted by the secretary when there are not three members present to sign the cheques: so, the simplest mode is to sign the cheques, and leave the amount to be drawn in blank, to be filled up as occasion may require.”

This short and easy method had been adopted several times, without any cause for doubting the wisdom of this measure—“Confidence being,” said Sir Edward, “the soul of business!” We do not believe that he had any evil intention at the time he said this. However, it is true now, as in the days of Shakspeare, that

“The sight of means to do ill deeds
Makes ill deeds done.”

And this simple process of drawing cheques was doomed to be practised once too often.

For, it happened that one day Sir Edward had secret intelligence that the Wriggleton Railway Bill was safe to pass; certain members had

privately expressed their decision in its favour after hearing evidence : and, since nothing kept down the Wriggleton shares but grave doubts about the bill, Sir Edward felt sure that in three days the shares would be ten per cent higher than they were then quoted.

Sir Edward, therefore, longed for money to invest—a mere temporary accommodation—that was all.

Nothing was easier than for Sir Edward to keep back a blank cheque intended for the secretary, to fill it up with the words *Ten thousand pounds!*—to buy Wriggleton shares with the money—sell the same when the bill had passed at a premium, and put a clear thousand pounds in his pocket ; while, at the same time, he could so manage the accounts—which were very much under his own direction—that the balance being all right, the slight circumstance of ten thousand pounds being drawn out and paid in again should never fall under the notice of the very business-like gentlemen of the Great Congleton Committee !

But there is what some persons call a fatality in such sinister doings. We should rather say, that the laws of Providence—some, perhaps, too subtle for mortal ken—are ranged all on the side of what is right, and all in fiercest

conflict to "confound their politics, frustrate their knavish tricks," for those who do wrong. So, unfortunately, the secret intelligence turned out to be false—a piece of stock-jobbing, purposely set on foot to raise the price of Wriggleton shares, and catch men like Sir Edward Alex. The bill was thrown out through some informality, though with every prospect of its ultimately passing; so, down went the shares, though marketable still.

Sir Edward hastened into the City to save all he could of the money, but was horrified to find himself among a perfect mob of eager sellers in Threadneedle Street, and *three* thousand pounds was all he could realise—a very small figure, indeed, to cover the supposed "mere temporary accommodation of *ten*!"

What was to be done? Sir Edward could say he "never intended to steal seven thousand pounds!" Perhaps nine out of ten embezzling clerks could say the same—so careful is the Tempter of making the shock too great for a tender conscience.

Ruin and disgrace—yes, the fate of a felon—stared Sir Edward in the face. Curses loud and deep from men he had ruined—yes, ruined! for, the Great Congleton shares would now be waste-paper—already were sounding in his ears.

In imagination he was already hunted by the keenest of the detective police, and his name placarded all over London!

While with these feelings he was walking quickly down Cheapside, who should run up to him but one of his own fast set of former days, Grinfield—or Grinny—the same whom we met at breakfast on the Derby morning—Grinfield, who, as Foster said, was now quite beyond the pale of any family man's acquaintance.

"Hulloa, my friend! I've caught you at last!" said the simpleton; "we have been looking after you everywhere—half-a-dozen of us have—and we are lucky to have nabbed you at so convenient a moment."

"Caught me, indeed! Caught me!" said the guilty man, ready to fly, though no man pursueth—"What can you possibly mean by that?"

"Well, that is a joke!" was the reply; "you are cutting it fine, indeed, Alex—now you are up in the world, and rolling in riches, as everybody says, but——"

Sir Edward began to breathe a little more freely.

"—— but couldn't you let us into a good thing or two, just for old-acquaintance sake? I am quite out of luck, my dear fellow—I am,

indeed—I have only two or three thousand left, and I know you could help me to put that out to wonderful advantage. I mean, some decided ready-money stroke of business: cheap shares to-day, to sell high to-morrow, and bag the difference in no time.”

Sir Edward soon shook him off by some evasive reply, and said to himself as he hurried away, “There are not knaves enough for the fools, after all; I declare there are not!”—the truest thing I ever heard in my life.

As Sir Edward had now time to collect his thoughts, he thought that nothing could be discovered in possibility—but guilty men do not always know what is possible—till the next committee-meeting. This would give him three clear days. But how must he employ them? His guilty fears whispered, Fly! fly! Yes, fly he must, that was beyond all doubt: but, How? Whither? Where could he be safe? This was, indeed, a question. However, there was, at all events, time to think about the matter. But, first of all, he must go home and take away certain papers—arrange to absent himself—slip off into the country—watch the course of events—and eventually retire by some cool and well-considered plan.

But he soon remembered that there were

certain papers in his private drawer at the committee-room : he must step in as he passed just to secure those. It is true that he felt very nervous at going near the place ; still, these absurd fears must be mastered : so, being near the door of the Great Congleton offices, he took courage and in he went.

The secretary started back, almost staggered, at seeing Sir Edward enter. The fact of Sir Edward's venturing to show himself suggested at once a reflection,—“Then, no—he cannot be the guilty man ; surely it must be some one else!”

This altered the whole current of the secretary's thoughts. However, dissembling his uncomfortable suspicions as well as he could, he said,—

“I am very glad you have come, Sir Edward ; that is—I mean—that you have come so early to this meeting. Some fraud must have been committed. I trust I have done right, sir : I sent round at once and called a committee on my own responsibility for two o'clock to-day. You had my note, no doubt?”

Here was, indeed, a surprise to try his nerve.

At the same time Sir Edward saw the green-baize cloth and all the usual preparations for a committee-meeting. This was enough to over-

throw the equanimity of any man: but Sir Edward had that cast-iron physiognomy, and that strong command of those facial muscles which, with some persons, will twitch responsive to every qualm within — that enabled him to make some natural and commonplace remarks, and to say that, “it then wanted an hour to the meeting, when this extraordinary proceeding must be explained.”

Sir Edward now felt that no time was to be lost. Did the man really suspect him? If so, would he, when he missed him from the room, dodge his steps or watch him?—This he must risk. But, at all events, to go home was now evidently suicidal: time was too short. No, he must fly at once!

But every one will be curious to hear how the robbery was discovered so soon.

No one knows better than a London banker that a man who figures in committees for the mere decoy of his title is the last to be trusted in matters of business. So, the fact of so large a cheque being drawn by Sir Edward led at once to a little private advice on the part of one of the firm — whispered into the ear of one of the Great Congleton Committee, not to let one member of the board do all the work;

and before night the ten-thousand pound cheque was known to more persons than one of that too-confiding Congleton Committee.

Sir Edward knew that no time was to be lost.—By the evening of that day he had drawn in Bank of England notes the remaining three thousand pounds, and such other money as he could at once command, and had taken a passage in the Ontario, one of the largest vessels bound for New York, to sail three days later; a hasty outfit he soon ordered in Leadenhall Street, to be shipped in the name of Thomas Hancock. He had himself arranged to go on board at Gravesend.

All these preparations were made most literally in a state of bodily fear, and under such nervous apprehension as magnified his danger, great indeed as that danger was already.

The clock struck three!

“Then the committee are just about to sit down, in sad and solemn conclave!”

The clock struck four! — five! — six!

“Then, now the murder is out!—By this time the police are on the scent!”

Such were the ominous tickings of the clock to him — such the responsive throbbing of his tremulous heart!

By the time he rose the next morning he felt

that he was already the talk of the whole City—that, no doubt, bills were posted, and the hue-and-cry was raised all over London.

Saving the fact that the stages of Sir Edward Alex's fever succeeded each other a little faster than the actual events, his sad forebodings will sufficiently express the tale of those exciting and stirring days.

But whether his conscience and his fears suggested a correct narrative of the events of those fearful hours or not, there is one thing on which the guilty cannot calculate—one awful position, inseparable from their crime, of which they never dream, till they feel its power. We mean, that a guilty man finds himself, for the first time in his life, stranded and alone, and cut off from all the usual channels of information. The more deeply he is interested in passing events in the mouth of all, the more dangerous to inquire. He must shrink from all who can inform him; and, while bursting with feelings that want vent, he has no friendly ear in which to pour them!

Added to this, Sir Edward had not a scrap of clothes more than he actually wore—not a coat, not a shirt, not a comb or a razor—nothing! How, then, could he go to any inn?

In desperate haste a portmanteau was pur-

chased, and a few ready-made articles to fill it. He was cut off from his home and even from the past—ay, his very name must now be forgotten. “The world was all before him,” if he could but get safe into it.

While such was the current of his thoughts, that black living hearse, the prison van, driven by a man who looked utterly unconscious of the load of misery he was driving, passed by. The sight of this quickened Sir Edward’s step as well as his pulse. “It can’t be helped,” he thought; “nerve and resolution alone can bear me through!”

Sir Edward soon found himself on the way to the pier of London Bridge, intending to go on and lie concealed at Gravesend for the next three days; but just as he was threading his way through the streets there caught his eye: “Private theatricals and fancy dresses—costumes of every age and country,” and looking into the window he saw masks, whiskers, noses, and disguises various. A sudden thought struck him. In a few minutes he had suited himself with a wig, large whiskers, green spectacles, and a broad-brimmed hat. To this he added a sailor’s rough pea-jacket from a slop-shop near, and was soon on board a Gravesend steamer.

So, in the space of four-and-twenty hours—

so rapid are the changes of this life—Sir Edward Alex, Bart., had done all that in him lay to run away from house and home—from goods and chattels—from Bella and all : also he had learnt to dread the sound of his own proud name and title—to avoid the paths of men, and even to throw off every sign of his own individual and personal identity !

One thing only remained to live for—life—bare life : to drag out a wretched existence unhonoured and unknown ; down the now steep incline of bitter days ; encountering the infirmities of age without the solace, and doomed to say, with Macbeth :—

“ And that which should accompany old age,
As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends,
I must not look to find.”

It was on a Tuesday, about nine o'clock in the evening, that Sir Edward reached Gravesend : Saturday, he hoped—yes ; hoped most earnestly, as he had never hoped before—would see him safe on board. The people of the Mermaid Inn, as the landlord said afterwards, did really think he was a queer-looking customer ; still, they were used to “ furriners,” and naturally supposed that there might be more strange specimens in foreign parts than they had

yet exhausted in the way of business, and therefore Sir Edward attracted no particular notice or observation.

Next day, Wednesday, "Mr. Thomas Hancock"—such was the plebeian name he had assumed—was heard at the Mermaid inquiring most anxiously about the foreign news. This was a blind to mislead the landlord as to his real interest in the "Times," which he requested might be brought him the moment it was delivered; but not one word did that paper contain about the Great Congleton fraud, or the Great Congleton committee-meeting. This was natural enough. It remained for Sir Edward himself to add that interest to the Company which should entitle it to a place—with which it was soon honoured—among the earliest information.

"No report yet! True, true!" he thought, "Why should there be? What was I thinking of?" He did not consider the powerful magnifier of excited feelings—how the troubled mind ever goes a-head of the stately and impassive march of Time, and the even course of natural events.

But in the Thursday's "Times" there was the Great Congleton affair, large enough, indeed! As Sir Edward ran hastily down the column, the following catchwords met his eye:—

The "Gigantic Fraud"—"Poor Congleton Shareholders"—"Slovenly way of doing business"—"Sir Edward Alex, Bart."—"On board the Hulks"—"County man with a 'county crop'"—"Raffish Baronets"—"Greedy simpletons"—"Line never wanted"—"Trap for the unwary"—"Biters bit"—"Served them right."

In another column he read of a reward of a hundred pounds for the apprehension of Sir Edward Alex, Bart. This advertisement contained so minute a description of him, that, doubting the security of his disguise, he thought it more prudent to "have an accident with the newspaper" and burn the passage out. He had now had time to form his plans—to grow a little used to his new position, and to draw fully on those powers of ready taet, and that presence of mind, in which such deeply-designing, characters are not often wholly wanting.

Still, for a man of an agitated mind and over-excited feelings to remain in-doors is very difficult. Motion is the one great sedative to allay or to counteract fretted nerves and throbbing brain; and since his room was small indeed, trusting to his disguise he sallied forth to pass the Friday—"the last day," he thought; "and that passed, I am safe for ever"—and to pass it amidst the beautiful hedge-rows and highly-cultivated fields

of Kent. He had determined, for his greater safety, to be out all day, and not to return through the long street of Gravesend till after dark.

He had wandered some few miles ; and, as he avoided the high road, he met no one but labourers, when, emboldened by his apparent safety, and finding his false whiskers, tied as they were clumsily on the top of his head, very hot and irritating, he took them off, as also his green spectacles. After an hour, forgetting he was now but poorly disguised, he was leaning with his arms folded, in his slouch hat and sailor's jacket, over a gate, when Lady Mary Hamlyn and her niece, Miss Wilmott—both of whom Sir Edward had often met in London society, and who little imagined that anything had happened to affect Sir Edward's high position—came suddenly upon him.

Sir Edward saw his danger in a moment, and remained motionless as a statue.

Immediately Lady Mary started back, and said, quite audibly to his excited ears, "What a likeness, dear ! What a striking likeness ! don't you see, Bessie ?"

"What, that sailor-man ? Yes, I do see," replied her niece ; "you mean so like Sir Ed-

ward Alex? Well, really it is like him; very like him, indeed."

"I never saw such a likeness in my life," continued Lady Mary.

Sir Edward hardly dared to breathe, but remained without betraying himself in the least, either by look or movement; and was not a little relieved to see his two lady-friends soon pass on, talking in an animated strain of something wholly different.

By the next evening, Sir William Hamlyn received one of many circulars of instructions from the office of the Secretary of State to see that Sir Edward Alex, minutely described, did not get away by the port of Gravesend!

CHAPTER XIII.

HOW, IF WOMAN DID ORIGINALLY BRING WOE-
TO-MAN, MAN HAS TAKEN CARE TO HAVE
THE BEST OF IT EVER SINCE.

AND what had become of poor Bella?

If any one wishes to fathom the lowest depths of heart-rending sorrow, he must look beyond those afflictions which befall us in the common course of nature, and fix a searching eye on those which, by sinful courses, we bring down on our own guilty heads, and where we also wring the hearts of those we love.

The surgeon sees pain and agony in divers forms: but these trials are not without some secret power to support the sufferer, and then there is rest in the quiet grave. As to the sorrowing relatives, just as the mould that covers that grave grows fresh and green, and the scars disappear from the severed turf, even so is the wounded heart healed over by the silent operation of many a providential aid, designed

to engage the mind from brooding over its loss with ineffectual sorrow.

But, to see a fellow-creature supremely wretched, beyond the power of man or minister to comfort or console, we must go with the officers of justice to the home of unsuspecting woman, and tell her that one, whom many a long year she has nursed and cared for, is being hunted as a felon by the bloodhounds of the law, and that not one tittle of his goods or money can she from that moment call her own !

Such was the burthen of the tale which was now to break upon Bella Johnson.

Sir Edward Alex had been two days absent, and that without one line of explanation. This seemed strange to Bella, and perplexing indeed. Of late years, he had been more considerate and thoughtful of her. They had gradually entwined with a mutual dependence, and grown together—an attachment so far strengthened by time, that Bella had comparatively forgotten her former fears of being deserted for a lawful wife. By this time she felt too securely united by habit, and almost by nature, to dwell as much as she had done on his refusal to cement the tie by law.

It is also easy to suppose that Bella, being a woman of much heart and feeling, must neces-

sarily, if it were it only for want of any other object, have learnt by this time to rest her affections and centre all her interest, however little he deserved it, on Sir Edward Alex.

Besides, Sir Edward was not constitutionally harsh or unkind. It is true that an alliance which would render any fashionable connexion for ever impossible, was in his case a sacrifice too great for interest to make to honour. Still, he had some of those amiable qualities which win with ladies; and then, of late years, his health had failed, and there is no such tie as that which is formed between the helpless patient and the tender and devoted lady-nurse.

And now Bella hears strangers in the passage, and, looking over the banisters, she calls out anxiously, "Mrs. Williams, is that Sir Edward?"

"Then the party we want is not here, that is very plain, for this does not sound at all like a dodge," said a police-officer to an attorney's clerk, in a tone audible enough to the landlady, but which still left Bella in the dark.

"I never thought he was here," replied the other. "However, if we can't find him we must fall back upon the search-warrant, and see what we can collect in the way of evidence."

At the same time, without any of the forma-

lities to which Mrs. Williams had been accustomed in her apartments, these men of the law made their way past the rotundity of her august person, and walked right into the house, as far as the stairs.

Mrs. Williams now became nervous—nay, frightened, and utterly astounded: for, there is something altogether original and peculiar—something wholly unlike any kind of manners or etiquette within the experience of any Mrs. Williams—in the way that an officer with a search-warrant presents himself, asking no leave or licence of any one.

In this case they did affect to ask permission to—to—in fact, to go and do whatever they pleased, up-stairs and down-stairs, in the terrified woman's house: only, they seemed to proceed to action without waiting for any reply.

The first thing the officer did was to look into the parlour; and, seeing no one there, he took out the key and locked the door on the outside. Then he secured the street-door, also pocketing the key. After which he said, "Now, sir, if you will please to stop here a minute, while I look down below: not that I expect to find him." This was also quickly done, and one more point of possible escape was then secured on the top of the stairs.

The officer then returned—for all this was the work of a minute—to the landlady, whose feelings were finding vent in the usual wordy form; and then his first question was,—

“I must make so bold as to ask, ma’am, whether that lady that spoke was the *wife* of Sir Edward Alex, or was it ——? but you understand me, ma’am?”

Mrs. Williams paused, quite at a loss how to reply.

“Ah! yes. I understand, ma’am. There’s most always one of these ladies somewhere about it, whenever we have a heavy case on hand, like this, to get through.”

By this time the officer, followed by the clerk, had walked up, encountering on the landing, and almost driving before them into the drawing-room, the poor, scared, and wondering Bella, utterly at a loss what to expect, but having an indescribable and instinctive fear all the same.

“What can the matter be, sir?” she exclaimed, addressing the officer. “If you have any business with Sir Edward Alex, he is not at home: indeed, I should be glad to know where he is.”

“Then, that’s just what we should be glad to know, ma’am—very particular glad, ma’am, we can assure you; and as to having any busi-

ness with Sir Edward, why, that's just what we do happen to have, and a precious ugly piece of business it is, for ——"

Here Bella uttered a cry of alarm.

"Then, we might as well let you know at once, ma'am, that Sir Edward is *wanted*, and that's all about it. The charge is *felony*, and we've come with a *warrant* to search the premises."

Bella—as the clerk afterwards related—was standing by an easy chair as the officer began to speak. Word after word seemed more and more to blanch her cheek, and to turn her whole form to marble; but when the words "felony" and a "warrant" fell upon her ears, she had just time to turn herself towards the seat, and in a moment she had sunk, unstrung in every nerve, and with a heavy sigh fell swooning into the chair.

Mrs. Williams also received a cruel shock; but alarm with her took a more talkative and noisy, and therefore a safer form by far: for, as to speechless, silent grief, we always fear that it "whispers the o'erfraught heart, and bids it break."

Mrs. Williams was, therefore, able to assist poor Bella, and fan her up, and by the help of a smelling-bottle she brought her to herself, which,

at that agonising moment, was a cruel kindness, indeed. What was it but to revive in her mind—to enable her to realise—the utmost poignancy of distress, and to awaken an exquisite sensibility to mental torture?

As soon as Bella was sufficiently restored, the officer, with a well-intended, but, at the same time, rather a rough kind of consolation, said,—

“Come, ma’am, we shall want a little help from you, to do this job easy-like and pleasant; for, what must be must be, ma’am. We would not hurt you by any manner of means, ma’am; and the less trouble you give us, the smother and more comfortable it will be for yourself. So, cheer up, ma’am, and have a good heart. You know, things might be worse. It is not as if you was his wife, with a family, and all that. Then, there is something for a poor lady to take on about, no doubt. So, please give us up the keys of those drawers.”

Bella sighed heavily at one part of this sorry piece of comfort; but ultimately sobbed forth that she had not the keys: Sir Edward always kept them in his own possession.

“And very prudent of him, I dare say, ma’am. Gentlemen like Sir Edward most in general do keep such keys; and keep ’em pretty close, too: but then, you see, the places are all

the more likely to contain something that will be evidence against him ——”

Here Bella shuddered, and uttered an exclamation of horror.

“ —— something that we want, at least,” said the man ; “ so I must make bold to stop here while this gentleman steps out for a smith to come and pick those locks.”

Bella’s mind was in a whirl of confusion. She was too much shocked and stunned to have distinct sensations, or to feel acutely ; but wandered up and down the room, wringing her hands, and trying in vain to collect her scared and scattered senses.

Mercifully, indeed, is it ordained, that on such distracting and overwhelming occasions this effort should be vain. The wounded heart, like the wounded body, feels at first little but a sudden, stunning blow. It is some time before, with the full returning tide of life and circulation, it is awakened to a vivid sense of all the horrors that have gathered round.

However, Bella had not a very long time to remain in suspense or in ignorance of the intentions of her truly alarming visitors.

Every drawer was opened, and every paper was seized, while Bella stood helplessly looking on.

During one part of the operations she was comparatively passive and indifferent ; but when she caught sight of certain letters in her own handwriting, all about to be thrust into the same blue bag, this touched a tender chord of heart-stirring associations—many a passage in her fond, but anxious life, flashed through her mind—she uttered a cry, as if nature spoke within her, and sprang forward to snatch the papers from the ruthless hand that so callously was stowing them away.

The policeman, seeing this, and having, as usual, his cunning too sharpset for any due regard to his better feelings, rudely thrust his arm between Bella and her letters, and said,—

“ No, ma’am, no ; that mustn’t be. Why, those might be the very papers we shall pick most out of ; and likely enough, too, since you are in such a precious hurry to save them for your young man.”

But Bella persevered ; and that, too, with a degree of violence and desperation, as if her whole soul was stirred within her. Whereupon the clerk, seeing how inevitable was a painful struggle between the unhappy lady and the officer, kindly interposed, and suggested that, possibly, the letters would show him at a glance that they had no connexion with the

case in hand. He also compassionately assured Bella that he had every wish to avoid giving her any unnecessary pain. He ended by urging her to be advised by him, and perhaps he should have the pleasure, in a few minutes, of leaving any mere letters of love and affection, or any reminiscences of days gone by, in her own hands.

The very dates of the letters alone were almost enough to favour this view of the case, and Bella became more composed; only the sight of the letters, and the call upon her energies which they involved, had by this time restored the acuteness of her sensibilities, and she wept most piteously in all the agony of grief, crying out,—

“ Oh! where is Sir Edward? What has he done? what has he done?”

The clerk and the officer, in the course of an hour, had finished their search; and then, having sealed up all the papers, they took their departure: though Mrs. Williams detained the clerk, for more intelligible explanations, in her little parlour.

Of course, in this sudden invasion of the privacy of an establishment of late so highly exalted in public estimation, and so honoured by persons of all rank and station, Bella was

not the only person likely to be painfully disturbed. For Mrs. Williams's interests, as well as her feelings, were deeply affected by the present startling posture of affairs.

Sir Edward had been for many years her tenant, and a most comfortable and profitable tenant, too. Her furniture by degrees he had allowed her to take away, having replaced it, piece by piece, by purchases, as fancy prompted. Most punctual in every habit of business, he had been the best and the most convenient of paymasters; while, what with many a kind office—great, indeed, to the one party, though little to the other—and assistance and advice on all occasions, with a friendly glass on winter evenings, and the run of her teeth at almost all times, Sir Edward had been to Mrs. Williams the best of friends, “one of the very nicest gentlemen she had ever taken in, throughout the whole of her ready-furnished apartment-letting existence.”

With Bella, also, Mrs. Williams had lived, for some years at least, on the best of terms. True, in days gone by, there had been words between them, and Mrs. Williams had once cut Bella to the quick by one or two significant hints, that it was a condescension “to take in the like of her,” especially for a respectable

married woman, as she could prove herself to be, "by marriage lines," which she cared not who asked to see. Mrs. Williams had also, in her ire, let drop such terms, as—"trumpery," and "nobody knows who." But all this kind of rough civility—the mere expletives and idiom of the lower orders—had ceased for years.

Many a dull and lonely hour had these two ladies stitched and stitched, and talked and talked, away in company; and, since all blessings are comparative in this world, Bella and Mrs. Williams had grown, year by year, more closely knit together: not the least because Bella, on the one hand, had no other object for her friendly feelings; and Mrs. Williams's circle, on the other, was, as usual, thinned by the "dead march" of time, and the "casualties,"—always so common in the battle of life, but more and more frequent at the close.

Still, much as Mrs. Williams might feel for Bella, there is no denying that every one—in the old Roman way of expressing it—is nearest neighbour to himself. And a moment's reflection told Mrs. Williams that, as now half-a-year's rent was just due, and, she feared, never to be paid, all, or nearly all the property, lately owned by Sir Edward Alex, was now lawfully her own.

An unhappy woman, in the position of Bella Johnson, or indeed in the position of a lawful wife—and many such a case is known to every officer of justice—when a bank defaulter, or other criminal in the upper walks of life, has come to the end of his evil and desperate career—is, first of all, like one fevered and light-headed. Then, exhaustion brings sleep ; and it is not till she awakes that her mind is in a state to realise her misery in all its parts and all its details—to the full measure of its length and breadth.

The explanation we believe to be this : the mind cannot all at once change the current of the many thoughts and associations that have flowed habitually in one direction for years together. So, the mourner cannot, for many days, think or speak of the loved one of his heart, as if she *was*—had passed away—the book was closed—and as if new pages in the volume of affection, as yet an utter blank, must now be turned over, for the days to come.

When Bella Johnson walked forth from her chamber—her chamber? No, henceforth no more hers—she took, for the first time, a step into a world in which she had scarcely a penny that she could call her own !

She had little money, and no friends. She

had lived almost as a nameless one. No one who called—no one of her own sex, at least—ever saw her. Bella's very existence was ignored, if not concealed. Therefore, now, even the customary aid or subscription to meet the case of sudden and inevitable distress, was a thing that no one ever thought of, or even will think of, in a case like hers. No, as regarded most of her fellow-creatures, Bella's was a living death. As regards all power to elicit sympathy, or to draw one of the universal sisterhood towards her, Bella's is literally a living death.

The officer had learnt, by the long traditional experience of the police courts, to associate a name like hers with desperate courses, crime, and utter ruin. Therefore, nothing could be more hopeless than Bella's unhappy state—fame, friends, and fortune, all, all were gone.

CHAPTER XIV.

HOW THE GUILTY FLEE, EVEN WHEN NO MAN
PURSUETH.

To return to the fugitive at Gravesend, happily for Sir Edward, the state of the tide ensured the appearance of the Ontario at an early hour; and we cannot help sympathising in the relief of the poor scared and hunted creature when he once felt sure there was no officer on board to seize him. This was an event for which, in the agitation of his feelings, Sir Edward hardly dared even to hope. Indeed, he actually ascended from the boat in such an agony of fear and trembling that, just at that moment, even the certain grasp of the hand of justice would have been felt as a relief from a greater misery.

And now our hearts would almost go with him and say, "You have punishment enough; go and sin no more:" when once we hear that he soon found himself lost and unnoticed amidst

the crowd of Yankees who were smoking and spitting, and uttering the most unpleasent nasal English—a crowd that was diversified by one particular group of undeniable Cockneys, who happened to be standing at the part of the deck where Sir Edward stepped on board.

With this Cockney group Sir Edward first thought that, his appearance being remarked, his disguise had occasioned no little merriment—so ready was he to interpret everything, however insignificant, as applicable to himself—But no: one of this loud and boisterous party turned to him in the midst of vociferous laughter, and said, “Now, is not that a good one, sir?”

It then appeared—by no means an unpleasant diversion to Sir Edward—that the purser of the ship, who was famous for yarns, in discussing the quantity that had vanished from the breakfast-table, had told the story of a big man and a little man on board his ship, who once went down below to eat for a wager. After about an hour, this purser sent to the steward to know the state of the odds. The reply sent up from below was that “the big man had not any chance left; for the little man was a turkey and half a goose a-head!”

All this acted most powerfully as an alternative. So complete a change of scene was inspi-

riting indeed. Still, the fugitive could not help asking, How far they were to be towed by the steamer? and, Whether they were to touch anywhere?

"That will depend upon the weather," was the reply. "We hope to keep right out and make straight down Channel; but, if the wind chops round, you might have a chance to communicate with shore if we lie beating about off Ramsgate or Dover, or any place like that."

Sir Edward, pleased to find that the drift of his first question was not suspected, now ventured upon another cautious question.

"Then," said the captain, "you had better have any letters all ready, and that before we pass the Isle of Wight; for, once clear of the Needles, there's no more to do with land this side of New York."

This was indeed a satisfactory reply; the very point that Sir Edward wanted to ascertain.

Still, the guilty man's fears, like a dark shadow, with every point gained and with every advance, kept moving before him. The further he went, the further that gloomy apparition had drawn a-head too. One fear only made way for another—the same dark avenging power seemed ever lurking in his path. "And would it always be thus?" he thought. "Shall I never rest?"

Shall I never feel safe from the hands of relentless men ? ”

First of all he had said to himself, “ I shall be safe if I can once embark at Gravesend ; ” but now every port—every possibility of a boat from land—seemed to him to be a several and separate source of danger. His ideas of nautical matters were, naturally, not very correct ; and when he ran over in his mind the well-known names of Margate, Ramsgate, Deal and Dover, Folkstone, Hythe, he fancied that the course would lie within one or two miles, and so within easy reach of the shore. And as to Beachy Head, it did seem on the map to jut out very awkwardly, should any one desire to stop his flight just there.

However, Margate and Ramsgate were passed in the night ; but this only served to concentrate his guilty fears on the places that yet remained to be passed down the Channel ; and next morning he asked many a nervous question about the prospect of favourable winds and fine weather.

After breakfast on this, the second day of his flight, as he was passing by a knot, half Yankees, half Cockneys, carrying on that kind of conversation called “ chaffing,” of which there is always enough on board an American ship—to his great consternation he heard some one pronounce his own name !

He started with horror!

The particular topic of conversation was—national respectability and honesty, virtues of which no Londoner ever thought of boasting—but when once a disparaging reflection was made by the Yankee, the man to whom it was addressed felt indignant; and probably half Newgate would have fired up too, betrayed into a lucid interval of proper feeling. So, immediately—in the way of full and fair retaliation—followed a mild allusion to what he called the Great American Sponge: in other words, that wholesale repudiation of their debts which had made "*Punica fides*" and "Pennsylvanian Securities" convertible terms for evermore.

Hereupon the Yankee, holding a newspaper in his hand, retorted:—

"Now what have you to say to Sir Edward Alex?"

"What then," thought Sir Edward, "is my name of Hancock exposed already?" but, listening more attentively, he found it was his crime and not himself that was the subject of conversation; for the speaker continued, to his great relief,—“I guess we’ve fellows as honest without the title as Mr. Alex, in New York, any how.”

"Oh! but he is a notable scoundrel," said the Cockney; "so that proves nothing at all."

"He ain't a bit worse than the rest 'of you. Railway mania, you call it!—why it's a Robbing mania. And this Mr. Alex I shall stand up for, as a partic'lar sensible and an honest sort o' thief than some of you are. For, what did he do? Why, he was above going on robbing by scrip and waste-paper, so he put his hand into the bag and helped himself to the dollars at once."

This was the first time in his life that Sir Edward had ever heard himself called a scoundrel, and had he acted on the first impulse he would have knocked the man down: but those days were gone by. Sir Edward Alex, Bart.,

"Fallen, fallen, fallen,
Fallen from his high estate,"

has outlived the rights of chivalry, and slinks timidly away!

And now there was a gentle breeze that wafted them very slowly down the Channel. Yes, slowly indeed: much too slowly for the restless spirit of Sir Edward. For, now he began once more to fear that he attracted notice. Why was he so foolish as to be asking about the rate of sailing and time in the Channel, till some one remarked, with true Yankee manners, "Why, what makes you in such a tarnation hurry?" Why?—only because a guilty man cannot act

like an innocent man, and the burthened spirit must find utterance.

Every sail of the smaller kind gave a pang to the fugitive's heart—so strong is the instinct that sin and sorrow go together, and the wicked shall not be unpunished. At times he passed through fleets of fishing-smacks, the men lounging with their pipes and the sails barely swelling with the wind. The fellows looked quiet and inoffensive enough: but what if one of them should hail them with some such words as "A hundred pounds reward, captain, if you happen to have Sir Edward Alex on board!"

But, no. One after another drifted lazily and almost sleepily by, till he had almost ceased to regard them at all; but the last day before making the Isle of Wight—when the man at the wheel had said, "Now, then, whoever it is that is in such a hurry to see the Needles—not that I ever want to see them, I've seen too much of them by a great deal—he's pretty safe to see them to-morrow"—one of these fishing-smacks made sail across at once to cut off the Ontario; two men took to their little boat, and signalling for a line, came immediately on board. Immediately Sir Edward gave himself up for lost, when the whole of this ominous

visit proved to be to offer a cheap lot of fish, to save the men the necessity of going ashore.

"Now then," thought Sir Edward, "after this I am safe — I am tormented only by my own fears." They were soon clear of this dangerous-looking craft: the sun went down, and the critical point of all was to be turned on the morrow. Just then, as Sir Edward went below, some one asked him to cut in at a rubber of whist. As he quietly declined, the Yankee said, "I guess we shall play high-enough stakes to make it worth your while — dollar shorts and what you please on the rubber."

No, he thought to himself, mine is a more exciting game by far — a stake great as mine no man among you has ever played in his life.

Next morning the breeze had freshened — all looked favourable. Instead of about midday, they would clear the Isle of Wight by ten o'clock. Sir Edward paced up and down, and looked anxiously from the deck. Nothing could be better. "You can't see much of the Needles, we are too far off," said a passenger. Sir Edward thought, So much the better. He did not want to see them.

Now, at last, he felt relief — quite easy: there was not one vessel in sight. Clear and

open water now was gained. Nothing *could* stop him, and Sir Edward went down to make up for his broken slumbers, or at least to compose himself—a whole week's excitement and anxiety we all know, is trying—above all is it trying to have life or liberty hanging as by the strain of one single heart-chord, and then to find that chord suddenly relaxed and the burthen gone.

Great, indeed, was his relief—escape from England was all he yet could think of—the life to follow was an after-thought. He even felt thankful—grateful. Yes, now he wished he had risked a letter to Bella—“Poor Bella! what will become of her? However, I must consider—she may follow me.” And with some such indefinite train of thought Sir Edward threw himself down, unstrung in every nerve that now was creeping in his feeble spine, to rest awhile upon the sofa.

And there Sir Edward for some time lay; there he was resting—relieved—thankful—and composed—and his mind, perhaps, filled with all those good intentions which come and go with the ebb and flow of health and happier feelings—when, all of a sudden, he thought he heard the sounds of hurried feet and signs of some excitement on the deck above, and while

acutely listening to be quite sure he had not rejoiced too soon—the dead *bang* of a cannon sent at once a shot through the rigging, and a sensation as of chilly, curdling blood through his sinking heart.

“What can it be?—Signal of distress? ay, very likely.—But why do I trouble myself? How fearful I am!—It cannot possibly have anything to do with me! However, I will just look out and see.”

CHAPTER XV.

HOW TOM SUDDENLY FINDS HIMSELF IN A VERY
CRITICAL POSITION — ONE FALSE STEP AND
HE IS DONE!

TOM LANGLEY, having left poor Minnie in a most agonising state of alarm, and promising to send the earliest possible information of the course affairs had taken, was now with Audrey, in London.

The course of events all tended to prove that Fred Audrey's fears were not wholly groundless: for, though the members of the committee seemed readily to understand the explanations offered, yet everybody was in a mood to take vengeance upon some one, as the only means of vindicating—before the august assembly of the great jeering, laughing, not-at-all-surprised, and most sapient and heartless Public—their own infinitesimal pretensions to be thought men of sense. And what made things worse was, it so happened that one of the committee, who had always been voted the most troublesome and pragmatical bore by the whole party, opposing

everything both wise and foolish—their peculiar mode of drawing blank cheques included—and who, of course, was snubbed and put down on all occasions—this vexatious fellow had requested the attendance of Mr. Wandle the solicitor, of well-known Old Bailey celebrity, to watch the proceedings in his behalf.

The moment Audrey saw Wandle he knew what would follow—a charge against some one, present or absent, to a certainty, and not improbably, in the way of a feeler or experiment, proceedings in the first instance against Tom. Innocence rarely fears suspicion: but lawyers know the necessity of looking to facts, influenced as little as possible by any regard to the supposed respectability of any person whatever—their idea being that every man is respectable till he is found out. So, when Audrey heard that it was voted to leave the whole case in the hands of Mr. Wandle, he became really apprehensive, and hastened off to his London agents, Messrs. Turley and Brand, to endeavour to procure through them a favourable introduction to Wandle.

In this he succeeded, and dropped in upon Wandle at the very moment that a parcel of Tom's letters was being taken from the bag which had been filled with the contents of Sir Edward's private drawers. The evidence of

intimacy and frequent correspondence which these letters contained was fast producing an impression on the mind of this sharp and suspicious practitioner: and it was only when Audrey vouched for the respectability of his client, and no less strongly for his guileless inexperience, besides engaging also to produce him whenever required, contending at the same time for the extreme probability of such an offence being committed by Sir Edward alone, that Wandle was prevailed upon to screen the name of Langley from any frightful prominence in the prosecution.

Audrey, as a family man, well knew the importance of gaining this point. "Poor Mrs. Langley!" he inwardly exclaimed; "the very idea of such a thing would be the death of her!" Even then Wandle stipulated that every possible clue should be furnished and assistance given by Audrey and his client. This, of course, Audrey most willingly promised: indeed he admitted that the arrest and prosecution of Sir Edward was essential to the complete vindication of Mr. Langley.

Tom Langley was now in a strange, new, and most painful position. A week before he had sought Sir Edward as a friend, he was now committed to hunt him as a felon!

Is man a free agent in this world? Was

Tom Langley free to go to bed and to go to sleep after the receipt of that alarming express? About as free as the traveller who suddenly finds a poniard at his heart. One step hurried on the affrighted Tom Langley, and landed him on another, and now who can tell how far, in the space of eight-and-forty hours, he may find himself from his own peaceful and inoffensive habits, or his own quiet home!

Thus is it that we live, coolly playing with the future — proposing, planning, hoping, fearing and arranging, as if the world were all a chess-board, and we could shift the pieces, animate or inanimate, in the game of life according to our sovereign will and pleasure: when, all of a sudden, the very breath of a rumour, or some strange news, gives a new current to the thoughts, a new bias to the will, a new pulse to the heart — sweeps our fancied schemes like waking dreams away, and hurries us distracted among scenes and persons we never knew before.

However, whether painful or pleasant, the step remained to be taken. Tom's name and confidence had been abused. He had been made the innocent cause of a gigantic fraud, and it only remained for him to join in this man-hunt and to strengthen the hands of justice.

All this he had within a few hours explained

to his friend Foster, whose widely-extended influence Audrey had shown the greatest anxiety to secure.

Foster heard in his own calm way the whole story without reply, though it was observable that he rather arched his brow at the name of Sir Edward Alex. Not, indeed, that Foster ever suspected him of any of the more glaring kinds of fraud, but simply because he was prepared to hear of mischief from that quarter, and was at all times sorry to find that Tom Langley was so much in Sir Edward's company.

"Let me seriously advise you," said he, "to spare neither pains nor money to bring the guilty man to trial; for, unless you appear foremost and among the most active in this prosecution, ill-natured persons will always find something to say to your disadvantage."

Audrey was now introduced, who, after a passing allusion to the happy day they had spent together, years gone by, at Epsom, explained that what he desired was some introduction to the office of the Home Secretary.

"The present Home Secretary is my most intimate friend," said Foster, "and I doubt not he will interfere heartily in a case of this importance; for, the truth is, the Government are sick of the railway frauds, and all the consequences of

this railway mania, which have changed the honest trade of the country into a system of mere idle, unproductive gambling, the fruits of which do little indeed to help the Budget or the Exchequer, but do a great deal to add to the lists of insolvency or the cases for the Old Bailey."

The result was that, in the course of the morning, Foster, Audrey, and Tom Langley went together to the Home Office, and succeeded in obtaining the prompt assistance of the Government. Circulars were sent to bar Sir Edward's egress from the different ports; while the hue and cry was raised with all imaginable haste and activity.

In three days information was received from Sir William Hamlyn that a man, believed to be Sir Edward Alex, had embarked on board the American ship Ontario, from Gravesend.

The question now most anxiously asked was, Will the Ontario put in at any port in the Channel? That seemed highly improbable, but old Admiral Tamerton being admitted to their consultations said,—

"Why, there's Vignolles' ship, the Miranda frigate, doing nothing at Spithead; come with me to the Admiralty, and I'll soon have an order to stop any vessel coming down Channel. Let me consider: the Ontario, you say, passed

Gravesend on Saturday; now, with the winds she **has had** since, you'll be in time to cut her off **by the Needles** to-morrow, or, perhaps, next day **may be** soon enough to bring her to."

Within three hours Fred Audrey, with Hunt the Bow-Street officer, had started by the train for Portsmouth.

CHAPTER XVI.

HOW SOME OTHER PEOPLE HAVE THEIR HOPES
AND FEARS, BESIDE THE LANGLEY FAMILY—
A LITTLE BREATHING-TIME IN THAT QUARTER.

BUT the Langleys of Langley Hall did not constitute the whole 'habitable world, though so all-exciting and engrossing were the pursuits and feelings of the people in it, that there was some danger of their forgetting that every other heart in England, with the slightest pretension to have the least account taken of its thumps and throbs, at all events—was quite as anxious about the success of its own several budget of motions and propositions, hopes, fears, and expectations, as the Langleys could be.

One of the most fussy men in her Majesty's navy was Lieutenant Andrews. He was sent as a middy on board the Thunderer, in the days when sea air was supposed to be a sovereign cure for every wild and unmanageable youth, and when the public service was also

regarded as a kind of Foundling Hospital for the untimely progeny of men of high degree. Now Sammy, for so he was called, was always boasting of his own high pedigree, and grumbling at his own slow promotion; all because, as he said, he had the honour of being born in lawful wedlock.

This favourite theory of Sammy naturally made him rather unpopular: still, though he had been obliged to fight one duel in defence of it, he would not give it up—not, he declared, if he were to be drilled as full of holes as a pepper-box. So, as laughing was much better fun than fighting, Sammy Andrews and his slow promotion became a standing joke.

What little promotion Andrews had obtained was seriously ascribed to this; that whenever anything was to be had, from the Governorship of Greenwich Hospital to the superintendence of a lighthouse, one or other of the Admiralty clerks was sure to sing out, "Here's Sammy Andrews after something again!"

The consequence was, that those officials grew tired of having to fold up and to file so many applications, as also to dignify Lieutenant Andrews with the customary reply on a sheet of foolscap: so, at last, when one or two temporary appointments, in no great demand,

fell in, they indulged Sammy by giving his letter a turn at the right pigeon-hole, for no other purpose than to have done with him, and because they were heartily sick of hearing *his* name.

Now, at the time of which we are speaking, Andrews was proud, indeed, of having the command of the *Miranda* frigate, then lying off Spithead; but whether a certain officer would return to the *Miranda* or have something else, or whether Andrews would be confirmed in this high and honorary appointment, was a question; and every day that he could go ashore, did Sammy find his way to the Admiralty Office at Portsmouth, anxiously asking whether any official letter, in which he was concerned, had yet been received.

Every man on board—and, indeed, almost every officer in the club-room at Portsmouth—twigged this little weakness in their old and comical acquaintance; and, seeing that there is not much fun at sea, a little goes a long way: so, first Captain Baker clapped Sam on the back, and said,—

“Hulloa, old fellow! the Captain of the *Miranda* will be here, I fancy, about Tuesday.”

“Humph!” snorted Andrews.

"A short life, and a merry for you," said a second; "for I suppose you don't think a man of your small interest will have a frigate very long."

"Humph! much you know about it."

"What do you expect to have when you are out of the *Miranda*?" asked a third.

"Humph! as you think yourself such a clever fellow, perhaps you can tell us?"

Time was growing short; only two days more remained in which the much-desired appointment could be expected. Sammy was nervously pacing the deck, and then going down into the cabin; from which, again, at the peculiar sound of the slack of the halliards dropping on to the deck, he would start and run up again, and say,—

"What's that? what's that? Any signal for me—eh?"

And after two or three false alarms—once some one was jerking at the ropes for the fun of bringing Sammy up again—there was, indeed, a positive signal made and answered, that the captain was wanted ashore.

"Come, give way," said Andrews to the men, as he stepped into the boat. "This is very important business; I know it is; and no time is to be lost."

There was more truth in these words than he who uttered them was at all aware.

The boat had soon reached the shore ; and Andrews, sometimes running and sometimes walking, and in breathless fuss and eager expectation of being able to go back and "sell every one who had been chaffing him," soon hurried into the office, and there ran against two gentlemen whom he had never seen before.

One was a cool, quiet, wire-headed, and ferret-eyed looking man, keen and sharpset, but thoughtful and meditative withal. He exhibited a kind of character which was never formed under the peaceful institutions of any mild form of government, still less in the sequestered walks of Arcadian simplicity or rural innocence.

The other was a gentleman at this time, be it remembered, about sixty years of age—already well-known to the reader.

"I have some instructions for you at last, Mr. Andrews," said the official.

"Hurrah!" exclaimed Andrews; "then I am to have the command of the Miranda, and I suppose Vignolles has something else?"

"Your instructions are," continued the clerk, as gravely as his sense of the ridiculous would permit, "to take these gentlemen," pointing to Audrey and Hunt the Bow-Street officer,

"on board your ship; to lie off the Needles; to stop the Ontario, an American ship coming down Channel, and then to do whatever these gentlemen require of you."

Poor Sam Andrews at this looked blank, indeed.

"Well, that is a 'sell!'" said Captain Welbore, who was standing by, always ready for a laugh at others' expense.

However, nothing was to be done but to obey; and Sam's disappointment, as soon as it was understood to be a mere thief-taking affair, spread about as fast as a little ill-natured news always does spread, whether on sea or ashore.

The joke was, that Andrews had employment at last, to act under the orders of the new police, and to catch a land-shark on the high seas.

"Andrews is so savage," said an officer on board, "and our fellows do chaff him so about buccaneering for land-pirates, and being obliged to take his orders from a bum-bailiff, that if he had any pretence for sinking this American I really believe he would do it."

It was now about six in the evening, and Audrey knew he was in for a night of it, so he made himself sociable and pleasant, as his custom was, and soon found himself hearing

and telling long yarns over some grog and biscuits.

A real Bow-Street officer of Hunt's celebrity was a novelty, and some of the party tried to draw him out.

"Sir E. Alex's is a case of forgery, I think?" said Hunt. "In the days when they hung for forgery it wanted some pluck to go after a man. They were generally armed, carried pistols, and were queer and desperate customers."

"Then, how did you defend yourself?"

"Why, a man is wonderfully taken aback if you walk right up to him, as if you were doing something quite in the way of business. Some years ago a banker took me to Brighton with him after one of these forgers—a fashionable man, and every inch a gentleman. Well, we traced him, first of all, to the Ship Hotel, and then we heard where he had gone: also I made out that he had a brace of pistols with him.—'In which pocket?' I asked.—'His left tail pocket.'—'Then, come along, sir; all right,' I said to the banker; 'that's quite enough for me.'

"'Come along, indeed!' he said, as pale as London veal; 'why the man might shoot us!'

"'Well,' I said, 'sir, stop behind, if you please. Whether he would shoot you or not I can't say, but very likely, with your way of going

about it: so, if you are particular about an extra button-hole in your waistcoat, please to wait till I come back, for he won't shoot me; I know too much about it.'

"The banker stopped behind.

"In five minutes I espy my gentleman standing under an archway; so up I walked straight to him, and said, 'Beg pardon, sir; but your name should be Mr. Holden?' In an instant he put back his hand for his pistols, when I said, 'Now you arn't going to do that—nothing at all of that sort—so, no nonsense;' and down dropped his hand as if it were paralysed. I put on the handcuffs, and away we walked, quite comfortable and civil-like. I was sorry for him, for next Old Bailey he was hung—yes, it was by the side of a housebreaker."

"But, sir," said Hunt, as if he also were entitled to a yarn in return, "is that gentleman, I mean your captain, ever used to business? Why, it must be very easy work at sea, if a man, flustered as he seemed to be, is ever fit for it; for, he would never be any good at all ashore."

"Business?—seen service, you mean," was the reply. "Yes, our Sam did see a very pretty piece of service once on the coast of Africa, slaving. He and some others in a boat were stupid enough to let themselves be cut off by some canoes of

savages, and Sam was taken a prisoner. The first thing they did was to strip Sam of every rag he had on : I suppose, to see whether he was well-fed or not—but leave Sam alone for that—and next they took him before their king. Well, his majesty looked him over, then licked his lips and showed his teeth, as if he would like to eat him.

“However, it so happened that King Jombakoo had had his dinner that day ; so Sam was put into a cool place—he never doubted it was the larder—where he passed the night in a most awful state of alarm. Meanwhile his shipmates, knowing how the land lay, made terms, and Sam was ransomed for three barrels of pickled pork. And when Sam—as naked as he was born, in figure like an opossum, and spotted all over like a leopard with musquito bites—stepped on board, the roars of laughter that rang through the ship might have been heard pretty nearly as far as Blackwall.”

All this was a new life for Audrey, and after finding some good stories to tell in exchange, he turned into a hammock, but not without a prodigious deal of assistance at getting in, and slept soundly till the morning.

Next morning, about ten, the Ontario was in sight ; and thereupon the men began to chaff

Sam more than ever. This was dangerous : a signal was made from the *Miranda* for the *Ontario* to bring to ; but Master Yankee, as he never heard any such "stand and deliver" on those seas before, saw no occasion for that little politeness, but held on his course.

"There, you see, he does not want any of your acquaintance," said one man. "Well, I'll be hanged if I don't think that is barely civil of him !"

"Won't he though !" cried Sam in a rage. "Her Majesty's flag shan't be treated with contempt when I hoist it ; so fire a shot into her, I say."

Still the *Ontario* held on ; no one made more haste than was necessary to obey that order : but there was no appearance of bringing to while the gun was loading.

"Be sure you aim high enough," said an officer in a whisper, "or you might kill a woman with a child in her arms, to the eternal disgrace of her Majesty's service."

Sam repeated the order with the voice of a Stentor, and instantly a shot whistled through the rigging of the *Ontario*.

This was decisive—the *Ontario* came to, and a boat with Audrey and the police-officer, accompanied by Andrews, soon put off to go on board.

Sir Edward quickly perceived what had happened, and gave himself up as lost. He had no difficulty as he looked out at the boat in recognising Fred Audrey, well known as Langley's solicitor; and this caused a passing feeling of surprise and disappointment that so old a friend should thus appear to be first and foremost in what should at least have appeared an unpleasant duty.

However, Sir Edward at once determined to go forward like a man, and to avoid the most painful part of the arrest: he quickly threw aside all disguise, and requested the steward to go at once to the lawyer and to say that a gentleman wished to speak with him in his cabin. Hunt said that he must come too, to prevent his making away with any papers or money.

"I am sorry to see Sir Edward Alex in this position," said Audrey.

"I thank you; but I am also sorry to see that an old friend's is the hand that is raised against me. Doubtless, you represent Mr. Langley?"

"True; but Mr. Langley has no choice—his name being used, his character is compromised. He acts, by my advice, in self-defence."

"I see: I see. But you cannot do much; a breach of trust, that is all!"

“This is hardly the place to talk of that.”

“No, sir,” said Hunt; “we must be on the move, without loss of time.”

Of course a search and seizure of all luggage followed; and Sir Edward was soon on board the *Miranda*.

Audrey was a man to inspire confidence, and at the same time a man who loved fair play: so, as Sir Edward began to speak in a tone which implied a disposition to be confidential, Audrey honestly warned his prisoner that all he said might be evidence against him.

However, Sir Edward sought relief in words, and was impatient of being considered a wilful and intentional thief of 10,000*l*. The facts, he said, it were useless to deny; and if what Audrey wanted was to relieve Mr. Langley from all kind of blame, he would satisfy him forthwith.

This being repeated in the presence of Hunt, set Audrey's mind at rest: so, leaving Sir Edward in the custody of the officer, he returned as soon as he could to Brendon.

Both Tom and Minnie he found in a painful state of alarm, and Minnie shed tears of joy at finding that “this man, whom she never could endure,” was not, as she very much feared, born to be the ruin of her too easy and credulous husband.

CHAPTER XVII.

HOW—IN SPITE OF THE ANTI-CRUELTY SOCIETY
—WOMAN IS VERY HARDLY USED IN THIS
WICKED WORLD.

TIME had, as usual, pursued his stealthy march, mowing down both old and young, as the scythe cuts off indifferently the dry stalks and the tender blade—time had also hurried onwards the thoughts of men, overlaying by the exigencies of the present the regrets or the memories of the past; when one morning, about seven o'clock, we were crossing the Park, from the Victoria Gate to Apsley House, and saw a female dozing on a seat under one of the old elm-trees. Seeing a milkwoman with her stool and pails was moving from one cow to another, we asked her if she knew the poor creature, and were informed in reply that she “was one of a matter of twenty,” who when she (the milkwoman) came in the morning she found had been passing the night on the seats or sleeping on the grass in the Park.

The countenance of this woman we particularly remarked ; it bore traces of beauty, but evidently "the pelting of the pitiless storm" and "man's unkindness," and "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune," had all combined to sharpen the finely-chiselled features and to spoil the lines of beauty.

As we steadily regarded her, the features seemed familiar to us. Where had we seen them before ? Certainly not in any person of her dusty, soiled, and miserable condition, with bent and broken bonnet, gown all fringed with tatters, and shoes and stockings alike trodden to pieces. Where had we seen her ? Was it in a garb of a very different kind, and in some costly, dashing style, conspicuous in a brougham among the crowd of carriages ; and had she, the same, actually dropped as it were out of the circle of the rich fashionables who drive round and round the Park by day, and fallen into the number of those poor shivering creatures who huddle together in their rags, and partly sleep and partly wander under the trees by night ?

As we had now to pass rather near the seat she occupied, still dozing, with her head nodding and falling forwards upon her breast, we stood still for a moment, and by so doing caused her to awake, and to rouse herself as if about to rise

and walk away. We therefore could not refrain from addressing the poor homeless creature. She said she had no money for a lodging, or she should not have been there. We "*might be quite* sure of that," she said, with an emphasis that plainly showed that poverty was not so far habitual as to have lost its sting.—We gave her a trifle for the day and passed on, musing painfully on that ocean of misery of which this seemed unhappily to be but as one dark drop.

This happened on one fine morning in summer. On the following winter, about eleven o'clock, when severe frost had changed to thaw, and the pavement was inches deep in mud and snow-water, a countenance we thought that we had seen before—was it that poor woman in the Park?—followed us with a half gay, half sorrowful address. We turned quickly round and fixed a reproving eye upon her, beneath which she seemed too feeble and indeed too heart-broken to maintain her feigned composure. Seeing at a glance the kind of person she had made so great a mistake as to address, she changed her suit to one for charity. "It was very cold," she said; "she had not a penny with which to carry back either food or fuel to her sorry lodging."

We remarked that she appeared to have

been drinking spirits: how, then, could she be in want of food?

She replied, that without spirits one in her peculiar stage of misery could not endure to exist.

This we knew was but too true.

Cut off from sympathy or solace in their fellow-creatures—dreading alike the still small voice of conscience from within, and the louder voice of execration from without—and with no God to call upon for comfort! even the fabled furies, driving the guilty onwards with their viper tresses and avenging lash could hardly exaggerate the lacerated feelings and the frenzied mind which, added to the pangs of cold and hunger upon a shattered frame, goad, and ever must goad—but for the Christian hand held out to comfort and arrest—the female sinner onwards to an early grave.

We soon found ourselves searching in our pocket for some token of our sorrow and sympathy at least—ay, sympathy; for well we knew how one single fault—call it crime if you will, black as you can paint it, only use some shade of the same colour with man as woman—hurries on a poor scared and banished girl, on whom Society has once closed the door in outer darkness. Hurries? nay, forces her, by the resistless necessity of her fearful fate; and, as a living Bishop once expressed it, “by a physical neces-

sity of sin," involves all the pollution that then made us sigh for some place of refuge, by the aid of which alone could we take heart to pronounce the words, "Go thou and sin no more."

The words of kindness melted her at once to tears ; but seeing us look inquiringly at her gaudy dress, she anticipated a remark, and said, plucking it impatiently with her fingers, "Sir, this is not mine ;" at the same time she cast a significant look behind, and well we understood that look. She meant to say she was followed—watched.

But enough : it is one thing to put the purity and modesty of delicately-nurtured ladies on their guard, or say, to teach them to live humbly and thankfully, impressed with all the mercies they enjoy, while at the same time they retain a salutary fear of the cruel dangers that beset their unhappy sisters, once thrown by the folly or extravagance of their friends to struggle with a world as rudely differing from the home they have lost, as differ the icy seas from the waters of the south.—It is one thing, we repeat, simply to remind the parents and guardians of our lady friends of sins they know full well, thus confining our painful detail strictly within the limits of the preacher when he asks for pity and for succour for fallen woman ; but it is indeed another thing to minister to a morbid taste or a

prurient curiosity,—an error which, above all things, we have earnestly endeavoured to avoid.

And who was this most pitiable of all the children of misery? Who was this one out of the many thousands of wretched sinners, whose offences are visited in this world by a punishment more awful far than marks the resentment of society on almost any of all the evil deeds that men commit?

Yes, as a question of mere severity, as in some Draco's bloody code, it is too little considered that society never shakes its righteous scourge over guilty man with half the cruelty with which it pursues the faults of woman. Brand the soldier with the name of coward, or the merchant with the name of bankrupt: nay, drive him from his native town with the imputation of the foulest villany; let him ruin the honest trader, and reduce to beggary the orphan or the widow by his heartlessness and fraud; yet, after all, that man shall be found living out his days not wholly reft of the countenance and the sympathy of his fellow-creatures.

Who then, say — who was that one poor creature that here had brought the heaviest curses of society, the most cruel ban of human-kind, aggravated by cold, hunger, and sickness, upon her devoted head?

CHAPTER XVIII.

HOW THERE ARE VARIOUS STAGES ON THE ROAD
TO RUIN.

SIR EDWARD'S trial is now over. For three months he lay in gaol: and since, besides all the discussions that filled the three months before his trial, there has been one month for comments after it, the public have had enough of the matter. Every newspaper has had a leading article; and not a few have enlarged on the fact that Providence punishes fools as well as knaves, and seems to make use of the one to take the conceit out of the other.

But the more exciting the news, the sooner it is talked inside and out. In the City, two months, it is computed, is the longest time men can afford to talk about anything. Even at Brendon, four months tried the people very hard.

First of all, every one talked of the Langleys; what they must have suffered, and also how

they would look after it. And now everybody had seen them more than once, and had even met them in company, and actually seen how they did look. So, at last, after conning over the trial, and thus ventilating the matter once more, the thing was worn pretty well threadbare, and done with; though the constant fall of the Great Congleton shares prevented the subject from ever being allowed to drop quite out of mind.

As to the trial, the offence was one with which the law could not adequately deal, for reasons already suggested by Sir Edward to the lawyer. Sir Edward was acquitted. Indeed, as to forgery, or felony of any kind, no true bill was found to put him on his trial. The offence was nothing more than a breach of trust; though some other indictment, involving only imprisonment, was proposed, and Sir Edward was consequently detained to give time for the prosecution to consider about preferring this new indictment. Meanwhile, as he offered to refund all that remained of the ten thousand pounds, and to make some restitution besides, taking the blame wholly and solely upon himself, no other charge was ever brought against him, and Sir Edward was once more at liberty.

It was believed by those who knew most of Sir Edward's speculations, that what he

gained in one venture he embarked in another; and that this sudden flight and arrest was fatal to every scheme for realising with advantage. Sir Edward left England for the Continent soon after his discharge, with but little property of any kind—too little, indeed, to save him from dragging out the remainder of his days in comparative poverty, as well as in disgrace.

As to the extent to which Tom Langley's honour had been imperilled, this Minnie knew full well: and though this danger had passed away, still, the well-known connexion of her dear husband with a man who had been so painfully notorious, left a deep impression on her mind. The good old rule of living calmly contented with our own, instead of with a feverish thirst for sudden riches, once more rose in reproving dignity before her, and a still small voice seemed to whisper to that true woman's mind that all was not right: so natural is it to seek in sin the cause of sorrow, and to say, with Joseph's brethren, "Therefore is this distress come upon us."

But though Minnie knew causes enough to account for some of the depression and altered looks, now more and more visible in her husband, she became daily more alarmed at certain effects produced upon his health and spirits,

quite beyond her power to understand. This was, unfortunately, a kind of heart-sickness, of which he was likely to be much worse before he could be any better.

And now time had passed away: down, down, down went the Congleton shares, till every one who knew of Tom's ten thousand pounds invested could very readily calculate his loss. Add to this, call upon call, amounting to five hundred and a thousand at a time, was continually to be met, while, of course, all the more capital had to be sold to meet current expenses, because the dividend was only in hope and expectancy, instead of one in certainty and possession as before.

It is easy now to guess what must be the result—Ruin? Yes; but we must not go too much in advance of the natural course of things. There are certain warnings—certain premonitory symptoms in most great changes; and it is true of the heart as of the barometer, that the falling mercury forbodes the storm.

Where, now, was the buoyant and the light-hearted Tom Langleý—once the life of every party, and half-an-hour's happiness to meet in a morning's walk? Where? oh! where?

Behold him, there—you would hardly know

him—with his eyes bent upon the ground, pacing in agitation up and down the gravel-walk, or cutting impatiently at the thistles with his stick, and talking moodily to himself. The postman—he always hurries out to meet him—is hardly out of sight, and some formal, unsympathetic business-letter, has once more caused his nerves to quiver and his heart to beat.

Minnie plainly saw that something weighed heavily on his mind. Still his mood was silent. He would not look his difficulties in the face, but was hoping against hope—the way with all men on the road to ruin. His position was such that, in the case of another, had he been the calm looker-on instead of the party so deeply engaged, he would have seen in a moment that a change must be made, and made radically, at once. But drowning men—especially men floundering in a sea of debt and difficulty—catch at straws. So day after day passed by, leaving him in a state of nervous, ay, agonising irresolution, all the time frightened and fearful as a child to do that which, sooner or later, must be done—to look into the full depth and breadth of his losses, and to tell his wife and family to be prepared to hear the worst.

It may seem a strange term to use, but the

truth was, that Tom positively wanted courage: he could not master his fears and bring himself to tell the painful truth.

Wanted courage! What, Tom Langley! he who, on the cliffs of Rockdale, cried, "Come on!" when others said "Go back?" What, Tom Langley! who swung perilously over the chasm some hundred of feet in depth, trusting to one frail cord?—he who, to save another's life, so bravely risked being dashed to atoms on the crags beneath—did he want courage?

True, true: but this is courage of another kind. To storm the breach is one effort of the heart; whereas the slow tortures of the law's delay, and to thread the mazes of loss upon loss in one series of cumulative ruin—this involves a quivering of the nerves and one throb more of the already tensely-strung and distracted brain.

In plain words, Tom Langley was not at this trying hour—few men are—his own calm and proper self. At such times reason is temporarily dethroned, and we pity the unhappy man who has no friend to act for him—to disentangle all his intricate accounts—to set him clear of all incumbrances, and to start him once more in sober certainty as to what remains to spend.

This crisis was almost reached: Tom was in his study, with one more distracting letter in his

hand, when he was startled at the well-known tap of his darling Julia at the door : Sophy followed close behind.

They said—with many a smile and fond and winning way, which their father never could resist—that they had come to petition, though not a word had they mentioned to their mamma as yet, that they might be allowed to return the many invitations they had lately received, and have a little *fête* upon the green, with tent, *déjeuner*, and all, as pretty Mrs. Holland had.

“Now, papa,” said Julia, most innocently and artlessly, “out of all your railway gains we know you can just afford us that.”

The father clasped his hands to his forehead in a paroxysm of mental agony, then embraced and kissed both his dear girls most fervently ; and then, choked with the depth of his emotion, he turned and hurried out of the room.

The poor girls were frightened, little conscious of the cause, and ran at once to their mamma, to say papa was ill ! What could be the matter ?

A minute passed before the mother was found, and by that time a slam was heard at the hall door and the father was nowhere to be found.

CHAPTER XIX.

HOW TOM FEELS HE MUST BE WORSE BEFORE
HE CAN BE BETTER.

THE place to which Tom Langley so precipitately and almost desperately hurried was Fred Audrey's office.

Audrey was, at the moment of Tom's entering, in his private room, very composedly lounging back in an arm-chair—the cheerful morning sun illumining his bright and happy countenance, and shining on the top of his now bald head—and so composedly nibbling a pen.

Now, since every man in a high state of excitement expects to find everybody else sympathetically excited, too, the calmness of Fred Audrey staggered Tom Langley, and rather operated in a sedative or cooling way ; and soon the following conversation took place ; it being premised that Fred Audrey never for a moment doubted the purport of Tom's visit. Indeed, the only

wonder was, that the ever-memorable Great Congleton shares had not caused a visit from his client some months before:—

“Well, Langley, you are moving early this morning; has anything particular happened, eh?”

“My good sir, I come to you as a ruined man!” said Langley, and then stopped, and flung himself down into a chair: having thus thrown off the heavy burthen of his heart, and wanting voice to say much more.

“Ruined man, my good friend! Not quite so fast—or you must, indeed, be a cleverer fellow than your humble servant, by a great deal.”

Tom looked inquiringly, as for an explanation.

“Why, did not we in this very room make fast, some twenty years ago, the Kenterberry estate—ten thousand pounds’ worth, or thereabouts?”

“Of course, that must be safe!”

“Then, I should submit, that it is a very mild form of ruin that leaves 10,000*l.* at the bottom of the purse.”

“But how can Langley Hall be kept up on that? Loss upon loss—call upon call—one sale of capital after another has been going on.

My mind is in one state of confusion. I have not slept for nights. I cannot break it to my wife and family! I come to say I am positively distracted!"

"Come, come! Let us be serious—let us look the enemy in the face. Cheer up, cheer up! I have expected this difficulty for some time past: but, believe me, I'll make you, and I strongly suspect your dear wife, too, far happier—less miserable, I should rather say—than you have been for some time since."

"I positively have feared—have dreaded—have instinctively shrunk from looking into my affairs."

"Nothing more likely—this is always the way when a man feels that there is nothing very pleasant to look at: but I have no fear, no dread, no shrinking at all of this sort, I can assure you. So, sit you down quietly here while I take a pen. And first, we will have—*Debts*, how much?"

"Oh, they are a trifle! I sell capital so often to pay them—say 200*l*."

"Well, then, debts 200*l*., multiplied by two for short memories, gives 400*l*."

Tom faintly smiled, and let that pass.

"Secondly, *Consols*, how much? *Great Congletons*, how much?"

Tom made some reply in exact figures.

“Well, then, that gives, after realising at present prices, 2000*l.* less 400*l.*, equal to 1600*l.* cash; *item*, your furniture; *item*, the estate, that with house will net 250*l.* a-year.”

Tom brightened up at seeing certainty in the place of doubt; though every word seemed to say, Turn out of Langley Hall with the least possible delay.

And now a pause succeeded—Audrey being averse to suggest this sad alternative, and Tom being equally unwilling to condense the same floating thought into solid words. Still, both these gentlemen were well aware that each must be thinking of the same thing. At last Tom went so far as to say—as if drawing Audrey into some plain opinion on so great a change as that of the descendant of the Langleys departing from his ancestral home at Langley Hall:—

“But, how to break *it* to my dear wife—that is the painful duty that remains: for myself I would not care. I have endured such mental agony—such feverish days and restless nights—any change, for certainty to know the worst, were a relief and a blessing indeed.”

“Now there’s the old story! Why, women have far more fortitude when once they are trusted and told the length and breadth of their

husbands' troubles, than men give them credit for ; and as to my old friend Mrs. Langley, I will answer for it that ——”

And here the clerk entered, and said that that lady was in the office, anxious to know what had become of Mr. Langley.

Hereupon Tom looked expressively at Audrey.

“I know what you are thinking of,” said Audrey ; “ the trouble and the difficulty of long explanations—to prepare the way, and to break it gradually, with *quantum suff.* of vindications, of best intentions, and all that—your poor head is in one whirl of perplexities. I feel for you, my good friend ; I know the symptoms well: many’s the time I’ve seen them. You shall leave all that to me. I will have a little private talk with Mrs. Langley and ——”

Here Minnie could wait no longer, but was already in the room ; and seeing Tom, exclaimed,

“Then, here you are, my dearest ! yes, just where you should be, with your good friend to help you.—Pray, sound all the depths of our troubles, Mr. Audrey, and let us know the worst. I saw some storm was hanging over us, much as he thought to evade my questions—he could not rest—he could not sleep. I am quite prepared. Indeed, I have written, dear, to Char-

lotte Mildmay. I was determined she should come and help me: I would go on no longer; but all this misery I determined should be for ever at an end.—Why, I would rather make a bonfire of all the abominable Congleton shares at once, than see you tortured night and day, as of late you have been.”

“Well done!” thought Audrey; “I’ll back the ladies to beat the gentlemen at a pinch like this.”

And while this complimentary reflection was glancing through his mind, he fixed his eyes admiringly on Minnie.—There she stood, the same fine, fearless form as ever: the same unflinching courage in her full dark eyes; albeit those slightly drooping lashes spoke of a world in which already she had much endured—spoke of a deep conviction that much there yet remained to bear.

“Then you have perceived there was something,” said Tom, taking her white hand, already laid fondly on his shoulder.

“Perceived, my love! You have been fading like a leaf for days. You have had no proper rest for many a night. As you nervously avoided my scrutiny, I feared to add bitters to your cup by stirring it to the dregs—though this I should have done, with help of Mr. Audrey, months ago.”

“There is nothing so much the matter after all,” said Audrey. “To retire from Brendon and live a little quietly—yes, quietly, on what you have ; not painfully on what you hope for—to enjoy repose and perfect rest of mind, for a while at least (perhaps at the seaside somewhere), snugly and healthfully : really, it does one good to think of it.”

Here Minnie clasped her hands together as in fervent gratitude, to think that rest, repose, and ease of mind—care’s fretted wrinkles smoothed from her dear husband’s brow, and his former colour mantling in his now wan and pallid cheeks—that this was to be enjoyed once more, and that at so small a cost and sacrifice !

“Yes, yes ! see now, there ! Did I not tell you so ?” continued Audrey, slapping Tom encouragingly on the back. “Did I not tell you how little you knew of the depths of love, and constancy, and courage, in a true woman’s heart ?”

* * * * *

Some feelings are too great for words. Certain passages of affection are too sacred to describe.

Suffice it to say these were no words of compliment—Minnie deserved it all. Having now broken the ice and told the worst, Audrey pro-

posed to walk home with the fond but careworn pair.

The truth was, Tom Langley, like many another man, had been so long sapping and exhausting his nervous energy by the predominance of one brain-fretting trouble—with meals not relished nor rest enjoyed for weeks and months—that he positively required the doctor to set him up again: though Audrey's resolution to sell all the shares, burn every scrap of Congleton memoranda—and every drawer and closet was full of such rubbish, plans, prospectuses, and all—and thus to cut off all association with that fertile source of worry and of woe—this was indeed “to minister to the mind diseased,” and to smooth the way for other remedies.

Tom had made a clean breast and felt the burthen of years off his shoulders—a relief as yet unqualified by any painful enumeration of all the ills involved in the alternative of leaving Langley Hall—consequently, the excitement now had ceased, and the natural reaction came on which laid the strong man low, weak, and unstrung, almost as with paralysis: Audrey, had witnessed more than once all this kind of prostration from similar causes: so, he was not sorry

to see Tom safely laid up in ordinary and reclining on his own sofa,—where for the present we will leave him.

Minnie and Audrey now entered more fully into the matter; and poor Minnie, woman like, must go through it all, beginning, middle, and end.

She bitterly lamented the loss of her allowance—a promised two hundred a-year—which caused Tom, she pleaded, to begin on a scale of living which involved difficulties tempting to speculation and its usual miseries.

Audrey remarked that the said allowance made little difference; the money would have gone all the same. He added, that he would have had every farthing settled if he could; for, said he, “Show me a man without a profession, and nothing to do, and inexperienced as he must be—above all, with a free and generous disposition and a sanguineous temperament—it is different with the cold-blooded and atrabilious animal—and I will wager he does not long make both ends meet.”

Then Minnie almost wrung her hands in vexation to think that it was with any view of sparing her feelings that Tom had not long since retrenched.

“I would have gone with him to a cot-

tage — I should have been proud to have worked with my own hands for the dear fellow — rather than his poor heart should throb and brain should rack as of late it has done. But — but — really I can hardly forgive him — not to have believed this of me — not to have trusted me — to have thought that style and fashion and outward show were *necessary* to me — that I could not throw them off as trifles light as air for so much higher interests — oh, dear! oh, dear! Well, well, Mr. Audrey, now that I am trusted, my dear husband shall see, indeed, what I can do when love and duty both urge me on!”

And then she disburthened, by a free and full confession of all her straits and contrivances, and all her money-miseries — how all her life they had felt poor with a fortune that should have secured them ease and plenty. “Yes,” she said, “we have been, indeed, severely punished for our folly; we have known years of pinching poverty; never certain how much we could afford: to be generous and open-hearted was impossible — my husband has often quoted your own expression about ‘*appearing still very grand and genteel;*’ but, all the time, most MEAN and MISERABLE.’ True, true, true to the life, Mr. Audrey. I can hardly help smiling as I repeat

so satirical an expression as I am going to mention ; but, no doubt, you have heard it before. What we entered some twenty years since was the ancestral abode of the Langleys, but what we leave is, indeed, something very different : and, whenever I find myself sighing for the days that are passed, I will correct the illusion by acknowledging the justice of ' Hard-up Hall ! ' ”

CHAPTER XX.

HOW THEY TALK ABOUT "GOING OUT IN THE
WORLD."

AND now Charlotte Mildmay has arrived, sent for as the family friend, at a time when Minnie felt quite unequal to contend with the distracted state of her husband's mind. For, he had no sleep by night, and exhibited a peculiar twitching and nervous tremor by day; so that, to act with energy or decision, was wholly beyond his strength.

With Charlotte Mildmay, we must remember that the shadow upon the dial had not stood still. Though still lovely, still winning, cheerful, and gladdening to the heart as she ever had been, yet was it easy to see that life was now much disenchanted of its fairy hopes, and that, soaring less in the fields of fancy, she had a sober liking for certainty and fact.

No sooner had the little lady arrived, and

been shown a general outline of this little map of misery, than she trotted away to converse with Fred Audrey. What she had to say to him no one knew: she looked sagacious, and said nothing, till the evening, when, as she sat by the side of Tom Langley on the sofa, and fondly played with him, observing what a poor, frail, feeble creature he was, and that Minnie could knock him down with a straw—she told them both that she should insist on their giving their wits a holiday, while she must be empowered, with the help of Mr. Audrey, to disentangle and unravel all as best she could.

Minnie's heroism and spirit of self-sacrifice was quickly caught by Sophy and Julia. They said, like their mother, that they could be happy anywhere, and do anything—nay, if the worst came to the worst, they did not doubt they could go out in the world and earn their own livelihood!

Charlotte let the sanguine little dears talk on, though she ventured to entertain rather a different opinion about "going out in the world," and what it really meant. She also knew that neither of them had anything to take out into the world along with them—nothing that the said world was at all likely to value, even at the small charge of twopence. A little showy music, with

the fingering all wrong, some French, with a strong Arminster accent, and odds and ends of *Pinnock's Histories*, *Valpy's Chronology*, and crochet, formed with poor Sophy and Julia their whole stock-in-trade!—They had yet to learn that, in this world's warfare, the most spirited volunteer is of very little use without discipline and drill.

However, all these expressions—excited and romantic as they appeared to Charlotte Mildmay—carried a very literal and painful meaning to the heart of the nervous and bewildered father.

Perhaps every person of age and experience can recollect some occasion on which his fears have been excited about the welfare of himself or those most dear to him. If so, he will remember how, when once the mournful chord is touched, it vibrates with one note of misery, which seems to sound through distant years; and how it conjures up a long train of dismal apparitions and anticipated horrors, which all tend to aggravate the burthen of the sorrow, while, at the same time, the sorrow in itself, so far as it has any present and actual existence, is borne almost without a thought.

Just such a cord was now touched in the heart of Tom Langley. Already his mind was diving into the future; already he fancied that

he saw poor Willie dragging out a life of hopeless penury, to be quoted casually—as in his late conversation about old friends with Foster—to show the depth of degradation to which a Langley could be doomed to fall. But yet more faintly did his fond heart sink within him for his darling Sophy and his Julia, when the name of “companion,” of “governess,” or “going out in the world,” painted to his morbid imagination his two little lambs beset by ravenous wolves—two dear, innocent creatures, their kind hearts breaking, and their purest feelings shocked by dark designs, which some husband was foul enough to conceive, or which some jealous woman could impute.

Tom Langley was old enough to paint to himself the interior of many a home outwardly respectable. He shuddered for his children, when he thought of all the meanness and all the heartless tyranny that daily come to light, but which, till you actually live at another's mercy, you never would suspect. No stranger was he to that icy under-current, so often rippled over with the serenest surface and the warmest glow of courtesy and smiles.

This had been a long, long—a very long—day to Tom Langley—one of those days in which time is measured not by the ticking of the

clock but the beating of the heart; and Charlotte—for she always reigned supreme wherever she happened to be—gave Tom his flat candlestick at an early hour, and said, with pearly looks of softness and of sympathy, it was “high time that, like a good boy, he should take himself off to bed.”

Now, Minnie and Charlotte, we may be sure, talked and talked as two fond lady-friends ever can contrive to talk, even when they have nothing to say, but much more so when their hearts are surging and overflowing with excited feelings, and their little heads are full, as that of Homer’s seer, with “things past, things present, and things to come;” and, we may also add, with things far more than ever would come to pass, all at the same time.

Charlotte explained two things as already done and settled: first, that not even the name, or the most distant association with Great Congleton shares, should ever more be heard in the annals of the Langley family. The “moonshine” of hope and speculation was to give way before the daylight of certainty and things in hand.

Secondly, a tenant must be found—a probable tenant was already in view—for Langley Hall, ready furnished; certain articles, of course, excepted.

"And then," said Charlotte, "you can live quietly, enjoy the present first of all, and as to the future, I will allow you to enjoy as much as Providence is pleased to send—when it comes, *but not before.*" She added, slyly, "It is a good old saying, that if our misfortunes have come suddenly, so may our deliverance. Besides," she continued, "remember Gipsy Hester, who said that you '*were born to be happy, but with clouds between*': still, the garden of life was never so pleasant as when the sun burst out in the darkest of the storm.'"

And now, as Sophy was going to her room for the night, she had to pass her father's door. Something prompted her as she passed that door.—and we think that, considering the depth to which her feelings had been stirred on that day, a certain something would, under the same circumstances, have prompted any one—to stop, —apply the ear—and listen.

After listening acutely for a few seconds, Sophy thought she heard some inarticulate sound. She listened again, almost frightened at the suggestions of her own thoughts, and then she heard—she now was sure she heard—more sounds, as if gurgling and convulsive; then, softly as her feverish haste would let her, she opened the door, and approached the bed. She spoke, and

no reply; but the bedclothes were heaving, as with a tumult of emotion—the strong man's heart was shaking the very frame that held it, and his pillow was wet with streams of tears. And ask we why?

His Sophy and his Julia were present to his mind. The lax principles and the "follies" of his youth, then crushed as worms, now raised their reproving heads as scorpions. "Fair game," and "the way of the world," were pleas that now recurred with a cruel and heart-rending significance. Had *he* never laughed at light tales, little heeding the innocence betrayed, or the wounding of a heart as loving as his own! Yes, the measure which he had meted withal in the days of his youth might justly be measured out to him again, when his own dear children were at the mercy of this rude world; it was this that caused his unwonted tears to flow—for, *he thought of the fate of Bella Johnson!*

CHAPTER XXI.

HOW THE RECTOR EXPRESSES STRONG OPINIONS
ABOUT SINGLE-BLESSEDNESS AND WHAT COMES
OF IT, WITH LADIES AS WELL AS GENTLEMEN.

THE news that the Langleys were obliged to seek for a more economical residence than Langley Hall was soon known. Few persons were much surprised to hear it. Fred Audrey was dining with a large party at Mr. Armstrong's, and took that opportunity of giving the first authoritative announcement of it.

As to the way in which the news of their departure was received — as the thing was done, and boldly confessed and acknowledged — to the effect that that wide-spread speculation, which had ruined many, added to the expense of an hereditary mansion too large for the estate, had conspired to render the little less — there was no fun or merriment, and not even much satire, to be made out of it.

Tom and Minnie were always free, frank, and

friendly to every one, without the least pretence or affectation in their manner or address, and these are not the characters to provoke any feelings of triumph in their misfortunes; so all that the people could find in the troubles of the Langleys was an occasion for giving vent to much sympathy and kindly observations. In short, they one and all told Fred Audrey to assure his old friends that all Brendon would be very, very sorry to lose them, and would be exceedingly happy at some future time to welcome them back again.

Of course Audrey heard opinions and remarks from persons of all kinds and all classes, the remarks of the Rector included; and the Rector, we know, had been long prepared to hear of some imperative necessity for a change in the affairs of Langley Hall.

The Rector had already been to counsel and comfort his old parishioners, and had heard all the first impressions and all the spontaneous remarks which naturally effervesced and sparkled forth from the excited minds of Sophy and Julia.

"Going out in the world, did I hear, Mr. Audrey?" exclaimed the Rector. "Are they really in earnest, and have matters come to this?"

Audrey said he hoped not. Reflection would

show that the family still could hold together, and ought to do so.

"Well, well," said the good old man—turned threescore years and ten by this time, we must remember—"but really I was alarmed, because where there are single daughters all this too-fashionable extravagance is awful, indeed, to think of!"

"Then," replied Audrey, "your theory of living at *Agony Point* is comprehensive, indeed; and the evils that result so manifold, that even the poor ladies feel the effects!"

"The ladies! say, womankind of every class. Undoubtedly they do. Most grievously does it affect them. Look at the portionless Miss Barnetts, besides the one who so disgraced her family, brought up in idle show and fashion as if they were independent of the world, yet one day perhaps to earn their bread! My dear young friends, Sophy and Julia Langley, are in the same predicament—enervated and refined as for a sphere of luxury and liable to be launched into struggling, striving life, without being trained for its duties or braced for its hardships!"

"But, my good sir, your fears and anticipations are too gloomy. Perhaps a happier fate is yet in store for those dear girls."

"Never mind—you spoke of my theory.

This case holds good to show the tendency of the one great fault and folly of our day, of which I complain. Believe me, Mr. Audrey, the same cruel kindness that fills our drawing-rooms with idle, aimless, nervous, and melancholic ladies — simply because they are only fit to be rich men's wives, and men of the average earnings of the day, now more and more shrink from marriage altogether — the same, in exact proportion, aggravates an *evil* of another kind, at once tempting more men to live laying snares for innocence and preparing more women to fall an easy prey."

The Rector, after a pause, continued :—

"And this last is, indeed, a most lamentable consideration. They come to me to preach sermons and collect funds for Houses of Refuge, Penitentiaries, and the like ——"

"And do you not approve of this kind of charity?"

"Undoubtedly I approve of it. Give me time and money, and I would rescue hundreds; but what then? The more I reclaim of the present sufferers the more I stimulate certain fiendish traffickers to supply their place by others. I cannot shut my eyes to the fact, that, happy as I feel to hear of brands plucked from the burning, still I am only creating a vacuum till I attack the evil at the fountain head."

And that fountain-head — that fertile source of evil is distinctly — what?

“ Standing too high on the social ladder — daughters of small tradesmen, reared only to be ladies — daughters of needy gentlemen, reared only as for high position — persons of all classes living on a scale which cannot possibly last.”

“ But may not ladies live single, finding something to do in the parish — be Protestant sisters of charity, help our good Rector, and so forth?”

“ Bosh! bosh! That is the humbug of the present day. God is poorly served by compromise: and He made woman a help-meet for man. — ‘Help in the parish?’ of course they may: but so may the married, too. No one of the single ladies in all Brendon gives me the assistance I have from Mrs. Langley; albeit she has filled her proper destiny, and reclaimed and humanised, ay, well-nigh wrested away from *self*, that spoiled child and reprobate — for, reprobate by this time he would have been — our friend Tom Langley. Why, all the sisters of charity that ever lived could not compensate in an age for half the mischief which enforced celibacy does in a single year! ‘Either a *Christian* or a brute,’ wrote Richard Baxter. I would

almost say the same of a single man, beyond a certain period of his life."

Audrey thought the Rector spoke too strongly, and asked the Rector to give the measure of his *almost*.

The Rector said he would except the highly intellectual—men "wedded to the muse," to science, or to—higher interests still: not to forget poor Charles Lamb, and noble-hearted fellows like him—not a few—who are humanised and improved indeed by their devotion to a mother's or a sister's welfare.

And now Langley Hall is announced as let, and the sorry day is fixed for their departure.

But first we should say, that when Tom Langley arose in the morning after that painful night, in which, amidst the slumber caused by extreme exhaustion, all kinds of strange dreams raised dismal phantasmagoria in his restless and excited brain, he hung about his children more closely and fondly than ever. Never, no, never should they leave his home—never should they work for another! If anybody's servants, they should be his servants. He would cling to them as—he remembered when Macready played that mighty part—Lear clung to Cordelia. He would

say with him, when he found his ill-used daughter
in his arms :

“ Have I caught thee ?

He that parts us, shall bring a brand from heaven
And fire us hence, like foxes.”

And then he would fondly run on, quite in
the spirit of that poor old father, and think of
all the happiness they should enjoy in each
other’s tenderness and love, just in the same
way :

“ We two alone will sing like birds i’ the cage ;

. So we’ll live

And pray and sing, and tell old tales and laugh
At gilded butterflies.

. And we’ll wear out,

In a walled prison, packs and sects of great ones,
That ebb and flow by the moon.”

CHAPTER XXII.

HOW, AS THEY ARE NOW GOING TO MAKE A FRESH START, THEY DETERMINE THAT THEY POSITIVELY WILL BE A LITTLE WISER THIS TIME.

BUT the time came in which they had to consult about where to go. Quietude and retirement just then had especial charms: they felt as if they never should want company, or any diversion or excitement more. Rest—rest and repose, seemed blessings inexhaustible to their long-racked and troubled minds.

At last Eastmouth—a beautiful little retreat on the Southern coast, with a small half-pay population, each keeping the other in countenance in voting millionaires vulgar and limited incomes a sure sign of good family—this was to be their future residence.

Just then Charlotte Mildmay came home, primed both by Audrey and the Rector with one highly necessary caution; namely, that it was quite possible to enact the same tragedy over

again, and that if once they began too high, Hard-up Cottage might not promise so much more repose than Hard-up Hall.

This was well thought of.

“No, no,” said Tom, “one lesson of this kind shall serve me for a life. If we went to a colony we should use our own hands. So, a cottage and a little ground shall be the establishment. Farming, when all is done with your own hands—or call it gardening—is profitable enough. Trust me henceforth to keep a wide margin for emergencies, and—that great secret of every-day happiness—money always at command.

Minnie brightened up at the thought of this. A village girl to do all that was repulsive, and to save Sophy and Julia’s pretty hands—“She would not spoil them for the world:” of course not: so prone is nature and a mother’s pride to ooze out at every pore—this was all she wanted. What! was three hundred a-year and a fund in hand not enough, indeed? Really, Minnie began to doubt how she should ever spend it. Sophy and Julia also set to work, and summed up all they could do, and (what made a far more imposing appearance in the calculation) all that they were quite sure they could very soon learn to do. “Ironing they should enjoy—especially on a cold morning. Mangling could be

put out, at so much a-dozen ; and washing, of course, the girl could do. Why, what they should positively save in things not being torn, lost, and scorched, would alone be a consideration ! ”

This we give as a sample of their castle (or rather cottage) in the air. This will exemplify their ingenious contrivances, how Poverty was to be reft of its sting, and how Father Ocean-of-life was actually to wonder at such calm, smooth-water sailing, and was to ask what had become of all his storms.

It was particularly observable at this great crisis of the Langley fortunes, that while they thought of what they were going to do they were happy, — a kind of Robinson-Crusoe-like adventure took possession of their minds, — but when they allowed themselves to dwell on all they should leave behind, there was a sad sinking of the heart : still, it is not among the least of the mercies of Providence, that in all great changes we always have a call on our exertions to divert the mind from vain regrets for things past all remedy and help.

Of course Mrs. Farren was not very long in coming — not only with much kind, though excited, sympathy, but also with a life-long collection of cheap recipes and ready contrivances. She declared that a small establishment — a big

word for a cottage — had most enviable advantages ; and that as to feeding so many servants, forbidding their followers, and putting up with their idleness and impudence, she should really congratulate any one on going without them. A little call upon the energies of young ladies would do them no harm ; and, for her part, she never doubted that if Jane Barnett had been obliged to wait upon her parents, and look after the house, and exert herself a little, she would never have run off with that trumpery little music-master.

We do not mean to convey the impression that persons have more heart because they have less refinement, nor that the “new creations” stood alone in kind offices on this occasion, if we mention that soon old Mrs. Holland set forth, with her livery-servant leading the pony-chair — for her walking-days were long since past, and her legs laid up in ordinary — and came to console and comfort Minnie with many “wise saws and modern instances” of the ups and downs she had seen in her long life, and people none the better before and none the worse for it afterwards.

“Why, bless you, child,” she said, “you must be thankful that, not like some folk, you have got a certain something. This bit of

land is settled on yourself: that everybody knows. Then you have two great girls, big enough to wait upon you — yes, and do 'em good, too; and what is more, you have no young babbies in the way, and none a-coming, — though one most always is whenever there is a trouble; and there's no bankruptcies, no 'Solvency Courts, no hard-hearted creditors — why, surely, your husband's, Mrs. Langley, is not half a failure. But I can tell you, child, that where we lived in business we were always hearing of such things. So, your break-up I call next to nothing at all; still, I came to say, that if there is any little neighbourly act — Couldn't you stop a bit along with us — all of you — while the house is being put about and the move a-making?"

Minnie thanked the old lady cordially, as she explained that they had no occasion to trouble her, and among many a kind and feeling remark observed, that there were many old friends, poor as well as rich, she grieved to part from.

Mrs. Holland caught at this hint, and said, "Yes, my dear, the poor will miss you. Many's the pitcher of soup and a fortune in flannel petticoats o' Christmas, you've a-given away. But don't let that trouble your kind little heart.

Just give me the poor souls' names, that's all ; they shall be all on my list ; and I'll see that they have a precious good allowance, for your sake."

This hearty kindness, so truly like the impulse of a genuine and honest nature, was too much for Minnie, and almost overpowering. It went far to prove to her that this homely distiller's wife, in point of good breeding, had, in one sense, the best blood in England—namely, that which gushes warm and generous through a noble heart.

CHAPTER XXIII.

HOW ONE OF TOM LANGLEY'S LADY FRIENDS FARES
BETTER THAN THERE WAS REASON TO EXPECT.

AND where was Bella—the pitiable, the penniless Bella Johnson—all this time?

The reader, we fear, has already guessed, and not guessed right. Perhaps we are guilty of misleading him.

True it is that we have already introduced a sketch of the headlong precipitation of one, the equal, nay, the superior, of Bella Johnson in early prosperity, and in the tenderness of parental care. We may also say, like her, unhappily in the folly and the cruelty of parental indulgence.—We drew that picture simply to enable the reader to shadow forth for himself the dark career which seemed the only one that awaited the houseless, homeless Bella, when a second day, a third and a fourth, brought no

tidings to make her hope that Sir Edward ever could return.

But Bella's fate was as follows :—

The few pounds she happened to have in Sir Edward's housekeeping purse, added to the little to be raised on some few valuables—including the trinket from Tom Langley, in return for her kind offices in nursing him while a bachelor—added also to the little that might accrue from furniture more than enough to pay the rent—this constituted a small temporary store and dependence while Bella took time to consider what could, or rather what could not be done, in this moment of her utmost need.

Meanwhile Mrs. Williams, as landlady, felt it high time to consider too ; and anticipating the verdict of judge and jury, and forgetting, perhaps, that Sir Edward was not even in custody, or, indeed, that he had never been asked to explain matters yet, nevertheless, like a true woman of business, she took a very decisive step, which caused poor Bella to sink almost into the earth ; she took a step which—if there had remained to Bella the slightest difficulty in realizing her forlorn and homeless condition—would in an instant have set the hard truth plainly and staringly before her. For as Bella was walking into the breakfast-room one morning, her mind

wrapped as usual in a murky cloud of sorrow, she was startled at the sight of a piece of paste-board leaning against the window, and turning it round with trembling hand, she read these ominous, these most appalling words :—

“The whole of these apartments to be let furnished, with immediate possession.”

Bella felt not only shocked at this, but incensed as a cruelly-injured person. “Mrs. Williams, after so many years,” she said to herself, “might have paid me the compliment of speaking to me, and asking me of my plans and intentions at all events : besides, how does she know that Sir Edward will not return ?—how does she know that this is not merely a vile calumny from some disappointed speculator, and that all will not be satisfactorily arranged ? However, here is notice to quit, most unceremoniously given indeed ! And,” she said, in an agony of grief, “I am to be turned houseless into the streets !”

So reasoned Bella : quite in a state of mind to quarrel with the landlady, and so to make bad a great deal worse.

But it has been truly and wisely remarked, that if no man is as good as his principles, most men are a great deal better than their actions. Certainly, actions so hasty as to be thoughtless are

a poor test indeed of our deliberate intentions, or of what we are capable at heart.

The conduct of Mrs. Williams on this trying occasion was certainly a case in point. While Bella was overflowing with grief and indignation, her supposed enemy was enjoying the most pleasing, because the most generous emotions.

Mrs. Williams had prospered in her vocation. Her brief history was this. She was many years before a housekeeper in a nobleman's family; married the butler; and, by means probably of a good place for perquisites, they had set up furnished lodgings in May Fair. In these alliances almost invariably the husband dies first; for, the same easy life which thrives with the one soon kills the other; and so it happened in the present instance. Then Widow Williams buried her husband, and found that a lone woman was not always an unprotected female — no one could take her own part better, or stick in sundries more speciously; and so she lived on in unruffled independence, all the richer for falling in with a man as little likely to think about things that "turned off bad in the larder," as things that were "eaten by the cat," as Sir Edward Alex, for he liked a quiet life, and wisely counted the keep of Mrs. Williams as implied by the very rotun-

dity of her person, and her having a fair complement of teeth.

Now Bella was not, of course, likely to trouble herself to carry economy, least of all when it involved fault-finding, and "seeming particular," by any means further than was desired by Sir Edward himself; and every lodging-house keeper in England will pronounce you "quite a lady" as long as you tacitly consent to oblige her in these two particular respects: the one is, to make no inquiries after what does not come to table; the other is, to pay and look pleasant.

Also, Bella, as we have hinted, was almost an existence to Mrs. Williams. Bella had long acted as a safety-valve to all her chafing humours, and had allowed herself at every emergency to be operated on, till Mrs. Williams had talked all her troubles off her mind.

A very cold-hearted French writer has observed that "there is always something in the misfortunes of our best friends for which we are not wholly sorry." With Mrs. Williams, in regard to Bella, that something was a standing ground for a fancied superiority and a grateful sense of self-importance, and last, not least, the pleasure which she was quite capable of feeling in a good-hearted action.

With all the confidence and composure that these sensations can be supposed to afford, Mrs. Williams presented herself before Bella, not very long after Bella had first seen the placard in the window.

"I see, Mrs. Williams," said Bella, "that you have made up your mind to let these apartments. Really, I think you might at least have signified your intention to me."

"If Lady Alex likes to rent them," was the quiet reply, "she has the first offer: so I trust there is no harm done yet!"

"It is trifling to suppose that I can accept such an offer; but if Sir Edward should return ——"

"Why, bless your dear, honest heart!" exclaimed Mrs. Williams, "where have your eyes been—where have your ears been—to dream of such a thing? Sir Edward come back! What, back from 'Merica! back into the hands of justice! back to be ——"

"How! how!" cried Bella, more scared than ever, "could you learn anything like this?"

"Learn it, my dear lady! Why, the papers are full of it. 'A hundred pounds reward for the apprehension of Sir Edward Alex,' is posted up no further off than the corner! and didn't

you hear them roaring vagabonds with the evening papers?—Shame that such ruffians should be allowed to bellow their lies about the streets and disturb honest folks!”

“I did not attend to what they were crying,” replied Bella.

“Then they were crying, ‘Robbery of railway funds! Sir Edward Alex! Gone to ’Me-rica! Large reward for his Execution!’—Why, the whole town is all alive with it!”

Bella sighed deeply.

“So, now be advised by me—there’s a dear, good woman—but don’t be afraid of me. I’ve the purest of motives—only, be a little sensible-like: for I’ve the best of intentions.”

It was not now very difficult to make Bella see the utterly irremediable and hopeless state of the case. This at length she admitted, by saying, in one burst of passionate emotion,—

“Mrs. Williams, I see the truth now. I am penniless, and utterly at your mercy to do with me as you please!”

And now Mrs. Williams cried and sobbed, too—persons in her line of life feel it quite a luxury to indulge in these little scenes on all plausible occasions, small as well as great. The end of this morning’s consultation was, that *if* Sir Edward did not return, other lodgers must be

taken in ; in which event, Mrs. Williams's years and infirmities—for she weighed about fourteen stone—would render some kind of assistance necessary ; and Bella—while all menial offices of an unpleasant kind would devolve upon another—might remain as long as she pleased to make herself a little useful and obliging : which proved to mean, that while Mrs. Williams indulged in a *siesta* in the afternoon, and laid her legs up at all hours, Bella should look after all that was to be done in the house.

CHAPTER XXIV.

HOW THEY RESOLVE TO MAKE THE BEST OF THINGS,
AND FIND MATTERS MIGHT HAVE TURNED OUT
WORSE.

THE Langley family had been about two years and a-half at Eastmouth when we paid our first visit.

"Which is Mr. Langley's, do you ask, Sir? Why, the Cottage," was the reply of one of the Preventive Service men, of whom we happened to inquire our way.

We soon found that every one else in Eastmouth spoke of "the Cottage" as if it were old as the hills — as well known as the post-office — in short, a characteristic part of Eastmouth, and quite a land-mark all the country round.

This description is true to the life. The Langley Cottage proved to be — from the taste and beauty of its rural architecture, with roses and woodbine — from its conspicuous situation, and also its illuminated stern-cabin window, for

such was the whim of the amateur architect in forming the end that looked over the bay — the admiration of visitors by day and a cheering object to the fishermen by night.

Tom had had such a lesson that he was determined that he would not begin too high up in the world — no more “agony point” — no more standing on perilous, slippery heights for him. Besides, on the principle

“Who falls from all he knows of bliss,
Cares little into what abyss,”

when Tom Langley had once made up his mind to humble life, he was not disposed to be particular about the exact shade of it.

Accordingly, after taking apartments while on the look-out, he espied two cottages admitting of being thrown into one — built with the thick, warm composition walls so famous in that part of the country. There was also some ground contiguous, sloping down beautifully towards the sea, as it lay sometimes smiling in ripples and sometimes chafing with all the foam and fury of its angry waves three hundred feet beneath.

His eye caught in a moment the snug and the independent situation, sheltered from the north and east, and admitting of endless improvement from one dexterous as he was in the

use of tools, and capable, now that his health and strength were re-established, of all the laborious part of gardening. Next, he espied a nook for a boat; and then, he thought, would he not soon set lobster-pots — catch fish — and, indeed, make himself generally useful!

These two cottages belonged to Sir Elwyn Haslop, whose estate lay near, with a fine mansion, which commanded a full view of the cliff where these two cottages, long most unsightly, stood. Sir Elwyn was delighted at the thoughts that an inveterate eye-sore was likely to fall into hands capable of making it picturesque; for, the name of Langley was not new to him. So, Sir Elwyn offered Tom every assistance with turf, shrubs, poles; and, indeed, general permission to pick all the fantastic wreathed oak or other timber cut down upon his estate.

Tom set to work in good earnest, assisted by one of the rougher kinds of out-door carpenters, and soon—with the additional help of a skilful thatcher—a wide verandah with trellis for roses appeared; then the two rude whitewashed ends sloped off with an elegant roof of tentlike thatch; and so, gradually, every feature of beauty in the far-famed Henbury cottages, or in those which sometimes catch the traveller's eye and make him long to stop and pencil it in his sketch-

book—was combined and reproduced in all the rustic simplicity which Moxland loved to paint.

Indeed, it was a sight to see Tom Langley early and late, with spade or axe in hand, assisting or directing in the structure of his new home; and, as to Minnie and the girls, the day was never long enough for them.

Before the change from Langley Hall, they had been “rather nervous”—“not strong.” Sophy had an ache on one side and Julia felt very much as if one was coming on the other. It was just that state of health of which a physician of our acquaintance once said, “Madam, if your daughters could only stoop to use their hands and heads in house affairs—then, no longer at the mercy of melancholic fancies or creeping nerves—they would want no quinine, but do far better upon nature’s own tonics.”

But sickness, like Satan, has not half a chance when life is energy in a useful cause: so, all the said twinges and fancies took themselves away, because no one had a minute to care or to think about them.

The rent of each cottage was five pounds a-year, ground included. They could, therefore, afford a little outlay to mend the lattice, relay the boards, and, above all, to fit up one end with a patent cooking, baking, boiling, and ironing

stove all in one — a thing too ingenious for stupid hirelings, but even to look at it under the hands of Minnie was to see in far perspective such cakes and crumpets, such tarts and tit-bits, such doings up of “the oldest *things* the newest kinds of ways,” as would make the happy husband say, “We should now have been ruined if we had not formerly been undone.”

One strong country girl formed all their establishment. Her great use, besides other menial occupations, was to furnish a pair of red hands at all times, and equally red cheeks at the fire, to save Sophy and Julia from spoiling their pretty fingers or fair complexions beyond the power of any future estate in Kalydör to repair.

Without anything so prosaic as a lecture on domestic economy, we may simply suggest that the wants of nature are very few, and that where every scrap and crumb is turned skilfully to account, and we are not eaten up by gormandising servants, adding wilful waste to incessant gluttony, shillings serve almost for pounds.

We may also add, that though we are not so philosophical as to desire to live dependent on ourselves and wholly to dispense with servants, still we must maintain, that those who, like the Langleys, are reduced to help themselves, are very little to be pitied. If they have occasionally

more fatigue they have always less worry : they live delightfully free from restraint and care, and can truly feel their house their own. And who is there, encumbered with a load of life in curls and crinoline, and flanked with pampered menials, all standing up for their caste or privileges, or boasting of “a proper spirit”—who is there that has not, many a time, wished to be free from the annoyance and to contend with their vexatious ways no more?

It may easily, therefore, be imagined that our friends, though poor in purse, might be rich in comforts, and be blessed with that ease of mind, that health and independence, which—it is too trite to say that gold cannot buy, no, we will even venture to say—which gold and “the deceitfulness of riches” too often causes us to forego.

This is no plea, no pretended preference for poverty. No; it is simply to maintain that Providence for different lots has blessings of different sorts; also, that the blessings of the Langley Cottage, whether greater or less upon the balance, were of a kind not known at Langley Hall.

Sophy and Julia were fast learning to do everything for economy and comfort, and displayed powers of tasteful and ingenious contri-

vance, and no small amount of practical talents. And these are points in which few young ladies, we believe, once fairly brought to the test, are ever found deficient. Witness the noble efforts and the ready resources of our countrywomen at Delhi and at Lucknow; neither can we forget that one of the most distinguished of those ladies, well known to us, had been before nervous, fanciful, and absurd as any idle young lady ever can be, simply because the folly of those around denied her energies fair play in a proper sphere of action.

Do we talk of a life of pleasure — of daily delight, and of a kind of happiness that does not cloy? Sophy and Julia had, at least, their share compared with the ladies whom they left at Brendon. For, success in a useful sphere — seeing our work grow beneath our hands — striving with difficulties and overcoming them; these, certainly, are elements that enter largely into all the pleasure or the happiness of a daily kind which this life can afford.

The simple ornaments of the interior: the screens, the festooning of the curtains, and the hangings up-stairs and down; the laughable mixture of pictures and caricatures in place of common paper on the walls, all had tasked invention to the utmost; while as to fittings and

carpentry, — with everything at hand ingeniously contrived for all kinds of use, Tom Langley was always well a-head of the family wants or expectations.

By the time we paid our visit, the garden was in perfection. The roses were quite a sight to behold; briars, torn up in their daily walks, they had budded from all that was most rare and beautiful; and as to the strawberries, such were never seen. No wonder: all the beds were formed of a rich but tenacious soil, carefully prepared, while hundreds of bits of glass and tile had been collected to save each berry from the ground. For, master and man now both were one, with wife and daughters all bent on his success.

In a word, all the same energy and ambition which at Langley Hall had been wasted in keeping up appearances, were now profitably applied to something real and well worth doing. The Langley pride and emulation were all the same, only they had been diverted into natural channels.

Neither were the Langleys without society. It was not difficult to find in Eastmouth persons of as much refinement, with congenial taste and pursuits, and that at the small cost of tea-parties, as in Brendon at the cost of dinners. Many a

time did Sir Elwyn and his friends make the Cottage the end of their evening walk, and at length so favourite a resort was the Cottage, that there was as much diversion there as at any house for miles around: though chiefly in the day instead of in the night.

Minnie, always famed for her millinery, had diligently taught her daughters the same useful art; and all ladies know the wonderful effect that is given by a lady of taste to simple materials.

But how could the Miss Langleys attend to the bell or open the door? Could they endure that the maid-of-all-work should appear? Even this difficulty was fairly met. Little do we know what the cunning of a lady's invention will devise. No one could walk up the garden unseen. Then, to "open the door" was menial, but to throw open the folding-window of a little ante-room for their friends to walk in was a compromise they could more patiently endure!

All these little scruples are weaknesses, we allow; but when was frail mortality ever very strong? All our feelings and failings will cling to us, and will follow us, and break out anew, wherever fortune may cast us upon the wide, wide world.

It must not, however, be supposed that it was all work and no play with the industrious

father. Far from it. Tom's amusements were various: he had a boat, with which he made fishing-parties, and this caused him to be truly popular. Indeed, it wants little money with some persons to contrive a most acceptable return for all neighbourly kind offices in a simple way.

But there was in this mode of living a luxury of another kind, like treasure untold to minds naturally as generous as those of Tom and Minnie. Tom felt once more free and independent; and this he had not felt for many years. Year after year he found a considerable balance in hand. This allowed all the public spirit and open-hearted liberality of his younger days to sparkle forth again. There was some freshness and gas in the water of his present life, which before had been so flat and insipid.

As to public spirit, that busy little East-mouth man, Commodore Bell, whom everybody dreaded with his red book and pencil, "always boring for a subscription for what no one wanted," reckoned on the Cottage as "a certain find." Old Rates-and-Taxes, also, was astonished. "At the Cottage," he said, "they not only pay, but look pleasant." As to charity, Tom was the first to head a list for Mary Anne Hill, the widow of the fisherman who was

drowned; and when any one was ill, there was no end to the plain-puddings and slops which the ladies of the Cottage would extemporise, and carry out, and deliver positively whole and untasted (not always the case), because made and presented with their own hands.

As to giving, they were not accounted backward at Langley Hall; only then they were faint-hearted and fearful, whereas now they were "cheerful givers." They not only spent money, as Tom told us, but they enjoyed the natural pleasures that belong to spending, when the one party is happier for the purchase, pleased also to see the other happier for their money. "We not only give now," he added, "but we enjoy it; whereas before we never knew what we could afford, and it used to be a heavy drag and drain — quite a nervous operation — and I used to feel a very unpleasant 'screwy' sensation from one year's end to the other." He had what he called a *bilious* fever every Christmas, and twinges of *tic-douloureux* every day in the week.

To speak plainly, Tom Langley's heart had been contracted year by year, and now it was "enlarged." Narrow means and narrow mind are terms too nearly allied; and he very truly said, that now he appeared to have awaked

as from a dream, and was painfully conscious that he must have been deteriorating very fast—losing the spirit of a gentleman—giving way to a habit of deceit and dishonesty—eating out all profit by a system of delays — and falling into all those habits inseparable from the ancient family of the “O’Calagans,” and the very atmosphere of any “Hard-up Hall.”

CHAPTER XXV.

HOW THE CARES AND WORRIES OF LIFE FIND US
OUT EVERYWHERE.

AMIDST all this comfort, ease of mind, and healthful mode of life, there was one—where in this world is there not one?—constant source of care and anxiety. All the news directly or indirectly heard of Willie was of a very unfavourable kind. More than once he had drawn on the money economised to meet his urgent calls for assistance; and once there had been a little family subscription from members whose existence we have left the reader to imagine, though we could not introduce them without crowding our drama and diverting attention from our Langley friends.

And now Willie had written to say that by the “Minerva,” when she sailed from Calcutta, he was coming home. “He had been advised to throw up his commission; having been very ill-used, and falsely represented, to his com-

manding officer." This kind of ill-usage, when mentioned to one old officer, made him look serious, and shake his head.

The method which Tom had adopted to remit the money last collected was not one of the wisest, as will in due course appear: but, in real life, wisdom is the exception; caprice, fancy, or impulse being, as the general rule, man's usual springs of action.

As Minnie sat at the stern-cabin window — so it was always called — she was continually looking over the sea. Every ship that went down the Channel reminded her how her Willie went, alike entrusted to that wide and pathless ocean — all too cruelly emblematic of the ocean of life. Every ship she descried that was homeward bound would lull her senses in a dream — half pain, half pleasure — of the happy day, if ever it should come, when she should welcome her dear boy home again.

But then the thought would glance across her subdued mind, If he should return, where can he live? Could another room be added to the cottage? And would he be contented with quiet life and such deep retirement as at Eastmouth, and no employment to engage his mind?

It was evident that while Willie was in India no money, with all their economy at the Cot-

tage, could possibly be laid by. Every foreign post involved a drain upon the sympathies of the family, if not upon the family purse. The fond mother could not but thank Tom most heartily for commencing as he did—so low in the scale of expenditure, though, at one time, she thought he was going quite to the other extreme: but his reply was always, “Be prepared for sickness; and, above all, think of the applications to which we are liable from Willie.” “And now,” said Minnie, “but that we were always able to comply, not one moment’s peace of mind could I ever have enjoyed.”

So true is it, that of all the cravings which economy should meet, we calculate badly, indeed, unless we also make provision for the calls of a generous spirit and the yearnings of the heart.

What a wonderful machine is our English post! If we picture it as centred in one great office, it represents to our imagination the very heart of the empire. It is an engine loaded with life and death, and joy and sorrow. It sends happiness at one time, and a heart-chill at another, through every vein and artery of the land. Its missives cause some to leap for joy, while to others they give a shock that ends but in the grave!

But there are many whom it agitates with pleasure dashed with pain. It makes them tremble with a mixture of sanguine hope, yet appalling fear, and stirs their very souls within them with a tumult of emotion only to be allayed by rushing at once—so agonising is suspense—to greet with ecstasy or to face with pale and breathless resolution the fate that awaits them, prepared alike either to lift the veil or to raise the shroud that hides the beloved object from their sight.

Minnie's feelings were of this latter kind, when one morning she received a few hurried lines from a friend to inform her that the "Minerva" had made the Channel. Information had been received in Eastmouth from a passenger on board, who, perhaps, more thoughtful than Willie, had a letter ready for the pilot's boat to convey to land.

But Willie had not written! Had he really been on board? or had sickness overtaken him, and was she yet to hear of one who, with a heavy plunge, was launched into the deep, thousands of miles away?—not like her darling Emma, laid beneath the roses of Brendon, but lost in the vastness of an ocean tomb!

The first impulse of the fond and restless mother was to start at once for London: but

Tom was soon surrounded by a host of advisers, and the end of the nautical consultation was that the ship could not be so soon in the Thames, and that they should trust Lloyd's agent, their frequent visitor at the Cottage—and a great admirer of Julia, though Julia did not choose to encourage him—to communicate with London, and to give timely notice of the earliest day that the good ship "Minerva" could reach the Docks.

Quickly as a mother's heart will bound and leap to a desired conclusion, we must often have felt that the slow march of the world's events and the measured ticking of the clock of time seem to be very slow, in exact proportion as our fevered pulse beats very fast.

Look! see there! Observe that lady sitting as at a cabin-window—see how, resting her chin upon her hand, she is gazing upon vacancy! Sometimes it seems as if her eye would overpeer the far horizon, and descry the sails not yet emerging from the convex main!

Mark! see how she sits, as if possessed with one single thought!—instinctively glancing, as she looks up from her work, in one only direction, and that over the open sea—ay, and if you could read her inmost thought, you would learn that no distant sail, small as a bubble on the watery waste, passes mentally unchallenged:

"Is my own dear boy there?" while every sad tale she has ever heard, whether of vessels wrecked almost in harbour, or of the son cast up at the very door of his mother's cottage on the beach—all tend to cast a deeper shadow over her anxious mind.

Hear how she talks of one only subject while she sits within; and, how every mariner is asked for his several augury of wind and weather and rate of seaway as she walks abroad. Then, who shall tell of her troubled dreams, and the one abiding thought that claims her as its own, the first moment she is conscious of the light of each returning day!

So six days passed away—then came Captain Mainard breathless, with open letter in his hand, to report the vessel off Sheerness, and only time for Minnie to reach London and make her arrangements before the vessel would reach the Docks.

But what was to be done? Mr. Langley had a severe cold and could not leave his room.

Now Minnie was secretly glad of so good a plea to meet her boy alone. "He would be afraid, poor fellow!" she thought, "to meet his father, after all his supposed disgrace." And then she thought how she would open-armed receive, and clasp, and comfort her erring child: bid him

cheer up, and tell him of all their ways and contrivances — how, though not at Langley Hall, they could, solaced with each other's love, be happy still ; and what a nice little room his father had been planning for him ; and how glad they should all be to have him once more among them ; and so she would smooth the way and comfort the returning prodigal — as only a loving mother can — for all the trials of a hard and heartless world.

So, off Minnie started, to travel by the mail all night — one hour in ecstasy, as she realized the rapturous first embrace ; another while palpitating with fear lest, envious of so much happiness, the King of Terrors should have long since consigned one more loved body to the deep.

“ As the sun went down,” said Minnie, “ and all through the dead of night, my sanguine spirits went down, too ; and gloomy thoughts prevailed ; but when the sun rose again, the fresh and balmy morning air revived me ; and though, of course, the case remained the same, my sense of coming joys revived and brightened, too.”

And now the fond mother has reached the famous Natchet's Hotel, has inquired for a messenger, and with many an anxious caution and precise instruction, sent him to take Mr. Main-

ard's agent as his guide through all the mysteries of the Docks, and that forest of spars and picked masts, to find her long-lost son, and to bring him with all possible haste to her.

In about two hours the messenger returned, and reported that one William Langley was on the list of passengers, but that he had landed, apparently in ill-health, at Gravesend — no luggage being left on board; he was a fore-passenger, and believed to have had no more baggage than he carried away with him in his hand!

So far Minnie trusted he was safe and sound: but the same tidings which had relieved her mind of one set of feelings, at once distracted it with another. No doubt he was at that hour in London, but how could she ever find him?

All this she thought aloud.

The porter said he could not tell, but his master knew the ways of London well, and perhaps the lady would like to speak to him.

An experienced London innkeeper is, in the course of years, asked almost as many queer questions as any conjurer; and therefore his conjectural powers are commonly kept in pretty good condition.

A mother in search of her son was naturally far too interesting a character not to command the willing services as well as sympathies of

mine host. Before he went up to her apartment he had collected enough from the porter to suspect, with the help of a little delicate inquiry from the anxious and distracted Minnie, that the traveller was almost penniless, and in so sad a guise that probably his own dear mother would not recognise him.

Accordingly he very sensibly suggested that the gentleman, on reaching London, would naturally hasten to his friends—above all, to such friends as would be most likely to relieve any pressing embarrassment. He asked, therefore, Had her son any acquaintances in London? If not, who was his father's tailor? or where had he ever dealt for cigars? In short, who was there, either gentle or simple, that had long known either him or his family?

This suggestion set Minnie enumerating all the likely houses she could remember at which the wanderer could apply for assistance.

And some very painful hours did she pass as she drove from place to place, and, between whiles, gave audience to one messenger after another, simply reporting no success.

CHAPTER XXVI.

HOW ONE VERY FORLORN AND WORLD-WEARY CREATURE TRIES TO HELP ANOTHER.

ALL this time poor Willie had found food and shelter under the care of an old acquaintance of himself and of our readers. For, while the mother was counting the stages and almost the minutes of her journey, her own dear boy—sad contrast to the tender care and delicate habits with which that mother had brought him up—without a penny in his pocket, without a stocking to his foot, or more than the shreds of a shirt to his back, and with not a rag but a sailor's jacket and trowsers; soiled and sunburnt; hair down his back, and thick and matted beard; pale and wan in countenance, and shivering with wet and cold, about seven o'clock one rainy April evening knocked at the door, as he thought, of his father's friend, Sir Edward Alex.

The door was no sooner opened than it was about to be closed as against the least prepossessing of the vagrant tribe, when Bella — for she it was — heard, in faint and plaintive tones, a voice she thought she recognised, uttering the ill-fated name of Lady Alex.

The recognition that followed it were hard to describe, and no less hard to portray the conflicting emotions of poor Bella's heart. Here was the son, whose father she had once nursed in sickness, but who yet had for years appeared cold and constrained before her, calling on her pity in his utmost need! Here was, forsooth, the shunned outcast—the disgraced, the discarded woman—in a position to feel she was not so worthless after all! What though Tom's wife had ignored her existence, and from the hour of her marriage had caused the only being that had ever seemed to feel for her unhappy lot to meet her with a certain quiet and distant look, that seemed a coldness where she yearned for comfort! Here was that woman's son, literally at that moment depending upon her for food and shelter!

Bella's resolution was quickly taken.—The woman's pity and the woman's pride prompted alike to that son's relief. Pity alone might have been satisfied by giving him a seat in the

chimney-corner, and a hearty meal; but her pride must go further still. So, she searched for the remains of Sir Edward's wardrobe. She dried his clothes; and meanwhile, no doubt, pity stepped in again to help upon the wanderer's side. She prepared not only food, but cordials; and she gave him up her own little bed. Next morning she brought him his breakfast, and encouraged him to rest his stiff and aching limbs till almost noon.

It was two o'clock before the lost son had crept again into his tattered sailor's garb, and then, Bella—with some little contrivance, for fear so wild a figure should meet and alarm the lodger on the stairs—led him down to her little work-room, next the kitchen, to consult as to what to do next.

The difficulty of Bella's position, as the house was not her own, was very perplexing; for, it was very much like a houseless wanderer trying to help another. Still, charity grows stronger by exercise; and it is also a kind of work that, when once begun, a woman is always very unwilling to leave off in the middle, so quickly do the drops of a woman's pity quicken to a stream: add to this, the very sight of Tom Langley's son revived in Bella pleasing memories of other days, and every look from

Willie of gratitude and dependence seemed to Bella to touch chords that had long since ceased to vibrate, and served as a link with the world without—as some kindly overture from that hard world which so long had frowned and chilled her from its presence.

With such feeling did Willie Langley and Bella Johnson, both, in some sense, outcast and forlorn alike, sit looking things too sad to utter, when this voiceless conference was interrupted by Bella being called away to attend at the house-door.

It was some few minutes before Bella returned, and then, waiting for a moment as she looked calmly and thoughtfully on Willie, she said, with that mixture of resignation and apathy which had become to her a second nature:—

“Your mother, Mr. Langley, is at Natchet’s. The porter says that she has been searching all the morning for her son.”

Bella sighed as she uttered the words. She knew what was likely to be the reward for her kindness. It was like awakening from her dream of happiness. Her degraded name must not be mentioned; she should never see her visitor any more!

Willie’s heart also sank within him. How could he meet his father and mother? (both he

expected to find) and with what words could he excuse the prodigal career that had brought him to the very husks of life, and levelled him with the swine?—So little did he realize a mother's undying love, however much our offences seem to separate between us and them.

Bella understood in a moment the sinking of his heart and the tumult of his feelings : a few words with the porter elicited that the lady was alone. There was no reproving father to confront, and Bella added some emphatic words, intended to rally and to reassure him,—

“Oh, what would I give if I had but a mother upon earth at this moment to be so devotedly searching, or any human heart that was yearning after me !”

Listless, bewildered, and almost passive, shaken in nerve, and cowed and demoralised by “the world's contumely,” “the whips and scorns of time,” this returned prodigal suffered himself to be thrust into a cab, and was soon at the door of Natchet's.

Minnie, tired and exhausted with the fatigues of the night and the anxieties of the day, had thrown herself prostrate upon the sofa, and was hardly conscious of any visitor till one, who seemed a sailor from the Docks, was standing in her room.

"What tidings of my son?" she anxiously exclaimed.

For a moment there was no audible answer to the question.

"What news have you to tell me of my son?" she repeated, impatiently.

"Oh, mother!" was the faint reply.

And immediately Minnie had sprung from the sofa, and was sobbing hysterically on her lost son's neck.

* * * * *

An hour has passed away. And now the porter had told the chambermaids, waiters, master, mistress, and all; and, no doubt, not a few of the families in the hotel had heard a rumour of so exciting a scene in the drama of real life.

Landlady, who had herself a long family, and perhaps a troublesome one, too, is soon drawn by the cords of her sympathies partly to condole with and partly to congratulate the fond and ever-constant mother. The landlord is also once more called in to their counsels, and with rather a more practical series of questions to solve; namely, how in the shortest possible time to change back Willie from his nautical rags and tatters to the semblance of his proper self. Of course Messrs. Moses or Nicolls could extem-

porise a suit, while the vapour-baths of Mahomet, the scissors and razors of Truefitt, and the stores of Rowland, from Macassar to Kalydor, are readily suggested and discussed.

Let us pass over some three or four hours, and then return to a more pleasing picture of Minnie watching over and comforting the child of so many hopes and fears, and cares and sorrows, so many sleepless nights and restless days, "who was dead and is alive again, who was lost and is found."

Poor Minnie! now she is happy. Deny it who can, there are joys in this life!—joys not the less joyous though they sparkle through our tears. She now has her reward. All heart and soul—thrilling affection and gushing love—she finds in the very trials of the wandering and ill-used son an additional zest in all she can do to recruit his wasted strength and smooth the lines of care and suffering so deeply graven on his pallid brow.

See how the mother hangs over her son as he lies prostrate on the sofa—stunned and overpowered by this sudden change of his fortune and revulsion of his feelings! See how she fans his fevered brow, sprinkles scent upon his handkerchief, or parts those curling locks, her pride almost from the cradle: He returns it all by looks

of tenderness and affection—he must hold her hand, or know that she is near him, for fear that, like the guardian angel of a dream, she should vanish into air, and leave him once more at the mercy of this rude world.—He can value a mother now. Time was when “fuss” and “foolishness” was the boy’s response for all her fondness. Time was when he was impatient to be free—to live where a mother’s hopes and a mother’s fears would no more qualify his fancied liberty.

Well! he has had his wish, and has now returned to what before he so little valued. And what was his reflection? What was the lesson he could read to little boys and girls who think lightly of the anxieties of those whom, in later life, we all confess are the only ones in this world who love us for ourselves—the only ones who live for—who devote and lose themselves in us?

Willie could—and, indeed, from time to time he did—express himself as follows: “I have sounded the depths of this world’s love—I have mixed with many men in many lands—I have experienced much good humour, some hospitality, and no little kindness; but all this is like a flickering and intermitting flame. It burns most brightly when you least require it. It sparkles up to illumine your path where all is smooth,

but soon it fails you in the roughs of life. Friendship — deny it not — is a reality, and, take it for what it is, one of this life's choicest blessings. Yet, do not expect too much of it. Friendship, of its own nature, is but a cheerful and a sunny feeling—"it laughs with those who laugh:" but it soon finds out your case is one for which nothing can be done when the time comes "to weep with those who weep."

"Add to this, there have never been wanting those who would lay baits for my weakness, to profit by my fall. But as to one earnest, one strong, persistent, and abiding wish and yearning for my welfare—I read it in my mother's tears when last I tore myself away; I picked up the thread of the same tale of undying love when first she threw herself on my breast and wept tears of joy for my return: but every feeling in this mortal world, compared with that feeling, has been cold, and chill, and blank in my life between."

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE WANDERER TELLS A TRULY PATHETIC STORY,
STRIKINGLY EXEMPLIFYING THE WAY SOME
PEOPLE GET THEIR SONS OFF THEIR HANDS.

"If all the world were like my own father and mother, I should never have been brought to the state in which you found me yesterday. Wide, indeed, was the difference between the home I left and the sphere that awaited me in India. In the one, everybody was bent on keeping me right; in the other, not a few conspired to set me wrong. Though I am ashamed of the old excuse of being misled.

"Men cannot in possibility be all misled—the vices that so many take by infection some must have in the natural way.

"My voyage out to India was the foundation of my ruin; a more reckless set of men than I met on board I could not have encountered. On board ship it is impossible to keep out of any person's way. There is no retirement—no

excusing yourself — no 'Not at home.' I may also mention, that there is nothing to do."

"You wrote, I remember, Willie, about getting up a play, and some other diversions."

"Yes, mother; and about catching a shark with a sailor's baccy-box in his maw; the man would digest, but the metal wouldn't: also about ducking at the line, and a few other things; but all this did not go far.

"Day after day, besides looking at the ship's course on the chart, and finding a little to say about any vessel that might have passed, taking our letters and exchanging longitudes, drinking, smoking, and card-playing soon became the only resource and the order of the day.

"You have heard of Major Harker of our regiment? Nothing you could have been told about him was half bad enough. He had just then exchanged from a West India regiment, where it is often a short life and a reckless one, which makes men desperate; and as to Harker, I really believe that he would have swindled his own father. With one officer who was going out, green and inexperienced as I was at that time, he gambled till he won every penny the man possessed — his sword, his spare clothes, and the very furniture of his cabin: but here the captain interfered, and threatened to have a

Court of Inquiry, and the things were returned. Not so with poor me. I landed in difficulties, and this same man, my senior in the service, and with power to prejudice others against me, blighted my career ever after.

"No sooner had I joined the regiment at Pondicherry than, day after day, this was the life before me :

"We began with early parade, after that came breakfast, cigars, billiards, tiffin, and then sometimes cards ; following the beagles, or riding across country in a party, according to the season, that is, the state of the weather, or the mood we were in. These gallops across country were very ruinous in horseflesh. My sixty-guinea mare was not killed in service, but broke her leg in a kind of rabbit-hole ; and it was this that led me to borrow the thousand rupees at the Agra bank, at high interest. After riding came mess ; and then, perhaps, either at my tent or bungalow—or at that of another of the set, we played cards again till bedtime."

"But, my dear boy, how could you lead such a shocking life ?"

"Why, it was the life of our regiment, so I needs must live it."

"And did all do the same ?"

"The majority did ; though, certainly, not

quite all. For instance, there was Field, who died of cholera at Umballah. No wonder he did die : a cholera regiment just marched out as his regiment marched in. Well, Field used to mope about by himself, and the men said that he died of torpidity ; for, he was pointed at and laughed at, as a slow fellow, very often. Now, Field could stand this, because he was fond of reading, drawing, and geologising ; but I was not up to anything of this kind, it did not happen to be at all in my line : so, unhappily, I went with the stream — and a very dangerous stream that was, too. Indeed, the climate alone, without great inward resources, is very corrupting. Men smoke and drink brandy-and-water, partly because they have nothing to do, and partly because they like it. So some men are always imbibing.”

“ Then they must grow sottish, selfish, heartless, and everything that is bad.”

“ This, indeed, was too often the result ; but the cost of such habits is ruinous, even in a pecuniary point of view, to one dependent on his pay. Horses are killed, or bad bargains made ; then comes the expense of a remove — we have to leave all we have built or bought at a heavy outlay, or sell it for little or nothing to the native brokers — and if, about the same

time, some Major Harker drop in upon you when your brain is swimming with spirits or clouded with tobacco-smoke, and should entice you to play——”

“I see, I see, dear, the perils that surround one young in years, and younger still in the ways of this world. Your poor father, with all his experience, has fallen a victim to a character of a very similar description.”

“Then, my money difficulties, dear mother, and the bill dishonoured, you will not give me the pain of explaining further; but all this I might have surmounted with a little care; only, it happened most unfortunately, just about this time, that all prudence and check on my own temper and expression of disgust were blown to the winds by two things; first, my father’s letter about making the fortunes of the whole family, and soon being in a position to recall me from India; and secondly, by Harker’s deep designs——”

“Your father’s letter to that effect! Indeed I never heard of it. Though, now I do remember making an observation that, I suppose, resulted in the letter to which you allude.”

“However, a most confident and sanguine letter it was. Still, I waited to hear again from England; but, meanwhile, temptations grew

stronger; I thought myself ill-used by my superior officer, and by some who fawned upon and flattered him. I thought, therefore, to bid defiance to my enemies, feeling my fortune as good as made.

"Harker followed on the same side. He hailed me as a lucky fellow, and said that, were he only in my position, he would send in his papers, too glad to be bullied no more.

"You cannot imagine how strong was the yearning to be free. For, always apprehensive of reprimands, I felt like a slave, and all the regulations and trammels of the service were like galling fetters to an impatient spirit."

"Oh, these dreadful speculations!" exclaimed Minnie. "To think that even our dear boy on the other side of the globe was to catch the same fever of imprudence that hastened our downfall at home!"

"Of course, Harker's only wish was to get rid of me. He was conscious that his nefarious practices were observed, and my presence was a standing reproach to him. I was afterwards told that the officers, as I passed, would cry 'Shame!' upon him.

"But now I come to tell of trials, indeed.

"After throwing up my commission, for some months I was taken care of by my friend, Mr.

Wilson, of the Civil Service. He was at that time living at one of these lonely stations, with not a soul but the natives to speak to, at which the 'Writers,' well paid as they are, must often be contented to live for months together. I had some little satisfaction, therefore, in reflecting that I made up by my company for what little I added to his expenses. All this time, from January to the November following, I was anxiously expecting remittances from home; and at last I made up my mind that the long-expected letter must be awaiting me at Calcutta. In this belief I could see that Mr. Wilson coincided; but he was too fond of my company to endure the thoughts of parting from me.

"It happened, however, about that time, that Captain Hawton, of the —th Company's, wanted also to go to Calcutta, and represented to me that, as the journey could be made chiefly by boat, the cost for two would be comparatively little more than for one. He proposed, therefore, to accept what little I could offer as my contribution, and to see me safe as far as Calcutta."

"I dread those one-sided bargains, Willie!"

"I also had a feeling that all would not go well—so I clearly explained, that I was safe as long as I chose to remain with Mr. Wilson, who

at that time was absent on business. But if once I started from his house, my retreat was irretrievably cut off.

"Hawton's reply was, that I might depend upon him, and in a few weeks I should find myself at Calcutta, ready to embark for England.

"Accordingly, I left such a letter of thanks, apologies, and farewell, as you may easily imagine, and started with some clothes, a carpet-bag, and some bedding, and arrived by boat at Allahabad, where we agreed to spend a day and a night, as it was a military station; and Hawton pretended that he had an invitation at the further part of the place. All had gone on amicably between us, but I thought, after a day or two, he seemed rather to regret that he had decided on going to Calcutta so soon."

"But was it not true that he had this invitation?—What happened? Pray, go on."

"So far was it from being true, that it was an artful pretext to desert and get clear away from me. For, while I was dining with a friend, a waiter brought me a note from Hawton—brief enough—to the effect that he was called away on urgent private affairs, and could not possibly proceed any further with me to Calcutta."

"And did you not go in person to ask an explanation for such conduct?"

"I rose to do so, but was told at once that he had started two hours before the delivery of the letter: having, in this base and cowardly manner, formed a plan to desert me."

"And how far were you then from Calcutta?"

"About nine hundred miles; and about fifty rupees was all the money I had in the world. However, with some little addition from my friend, I travelled with a gharie, or native pony-cart and man, from one dak bungalow to another, till I reached Benares. My money was then nearly gone, and my case was made known to the officers of the station. Hospitality I was sure would be freely extended to me, as long as I chose to stay; but my clothes were becoming shabby, and I was scarcely presentable, with a painful feeling that hospitality is among equals, but that charity was the galling term more applicable, by far, to me: and this I read in the looks of the officers, who were evidently ill at ease in my company. I remained, therefore, only two days to recover my strength; I was quite out of heart—feeling, for the first time in my life, how many a sting, which we neither know nor dream of while all goes well, is felt in the season of poverty and altered circumstances."

Here Minnie pressed her boy's hand most feelingly, with a heavy sigh of acquiescence.

"I proceeded in the same way, with a gharie, to the next military station. But here the same causes had well-nigh prevented me from showing myself at all. Sleeping constantly in my clothes, all travel-soiled with dust and sand, had made me a much more sorry figure than before. However, I happened to pass an officer who was swimming his dog in the river; he asked me a question, and my reply led to a few remarks, which caused him to express his surprise at finding a brother-officer at such a place and in such a plight.

"As I was fast going down in the world, it is curious to observe the altered conduct of others, as well as my diminished confidence in myself, that marked, as it were, the degrees on the barometer in the very winter of my fortunes. So here, for the first time in my life, I was not invited to the mess, but I was taken privately by this officer to his tent—to be relieved, I felt, rather than entertained; while two or three officers, who dropped in smoking their cigars, gave expressive shrugs and looks, as if my case were past mending. So I would advise every man in my situation to keep up appearances, and hold up his head as long as he can; for, the slightest thought that you are past helping will send you down with a run: and, what is more,

dear mother, you would not believe how readily people jump to that conclusion in India."

"India does not differ from England in that respect, dear.—But go on with your story."

"I was sent on to the next dak bungalow in an officer's trap—this being intended as an apology for money, of which officers are always very short. It is painful to have to think of such obligations, but the mind gets as shabby as the body does, where meat, and drink, and life itself, are sensibly at stake.

"I had now arrived at Ghazeepore, very tired and exhausted; but now another screw had got loose in my fortunes. The last mile or two I felt a shiver, with intense thirst, and queer all over; and, as I stepped off the gharie, my head was swimming so that I could scarcely stand. It glanced across my mind that this was the end of all my troubles—by daybreak next morning I might be laid in a grave, in a strange land, and no one to tell you whether I was alive or dead, or what had become of me."

Minnie drew closer, and hung over him more devotedly than ever—breathless not to break the thread of the story.

"A coolie who was handling my baggage, brought me some water, while I sat down at the side of the road. This was my third fever, so I

was well enough acquainted with the symptoms; and as some one named the Company's hospital, I sent to ask if any doctor would kindly come to see an officer, who was ill.

"A very kind and excellent fellow—I have preserved his name and address, hoping one day to reward him—soon was by my side. A few words informed him of my forlorn condition—a stranger in a strange land. He proved to be a Dorsetshire man, and had been educated at the Bristol Medical School, and quite greeted me as a man of his own county. He said, 'Cheer up; I'll do my best, and hope to pull you through this fever. But'—a sad *but* you will say—'what is the address of your father and mother? have you any will to make, or instructions to give, in case of——' 'Will! my good friend?' I replied. 'I haven't a penny in the world, save these few traps and the clothes on my back: but take down my direction, and write to my dear mother'——but you won't ask me to say more," he added, with faltering voice, "than that I thought last of you, and your earnest request that I would write—so, how cruel not to tell you that I was past the reach of all your fond hopes and fears!"

After some pause for Minnie to dry her tears,

feeling her much-tried son now dearer far **than** ever, to lead him on she said:—

“Well, dear, but you didn’t die, at all **events**. Did anything particular happen? Were you **in** a crowded ward, or how?”

“No, I had a small room to myself, **thanks** to my friend; I lay on a charpaz—a kind of string bed, and was ill for a month, before I was able to proceed. Nothing particular **happened**; nothing very interesting to you, **except** that the wife of a Mussulman was confined, **next** room to me, of three children, and they said it was the third time the same thing had happened to her. Whether all nine lived, I can’t remember, but she innocently remarked—for they are all great fatalists—that she supposed hers were always to be in threes: but ‘*Alla Akbar!* God is great, and Mahomet is his Prophet!’

“The good doctor detained me a week after I was well—as he said, to feed me up and lay in, as to strength, a capital to draw on. Had he not, the wolves and the jackals which I heard—no pleasant serenade every night—would soon have held a *post mortem* over my poor body: for I was soon too poor for any gharie, and had to proceed on foot, with one coolie to act as guide and carry my few things; and after two days—whether he

saw that my money was becoming short, I cannot **tell**—one evening he walked off and left me; **and** there was I in a serai with my traps, and no **one** to carry them!

However, I strongly 'suspect that this was a **burthen** that the rogue did not intend should **trouble** me long. You have heard of the Thugs, **mother?**—No doubt he was in the employ of a **gang** of them; not that I was worth strangling, **but** they have a peculiar art of tickling a traveller **heavy** with sleep, till he shifts about almost as **they** desire, and so they will draw almost any-**thing** from under him.

“Next morning, all but the clothes I lay down in, and my matting—even the carpet-bag that was under my head—all was gone! I had not a second shirt; not a cup—I have often drunk out of an old shoe; I had no knife to cut my victuals; and not, indeed, much hope of any victuals to cut. My travelling establishment had dwindled down through all the stages of boat, gharie, and a guide to carry my baggage, down to no guide and no baggage to carry! I never shall forget the forlorn condition in which I took my last look at my matting, which I was unable to carry; for it is often thirty miles from serai to serai—a serai is a native travelling station—with nothing to

pay, and not much to pay for; a mud floor, mud walls, and thatched roof. Yet, even this is a blessing, so dangerous is it to sleep out of doors.

“But, dangerous or not, I had not gone far before even this hardship I had to encounter. For, one day, after seeing the same afternoon some wolves and jackals devouring the body of a camel, I was so exhausted that I stopped short of the serai, and slept in a plantation of water-melons all night, while ‘Mistake’ lay by me.

“‘Mistake’ was the name I gave my dog. It had followed me all the way from the hospital—no beauty, something between a terrier and a greyhound—and I called him ‘Mistake,’ because it was a decided mistake to follow the fortunes of such a poor creature as I was. Still, you can understand my growing fond of the faintest resemblance to the only friend or companion I had in the world.

“All this time I lived on the food of the natives, who were principally Mussulmans. They were generally very kind. Their rice, fish, and chepatties cost very little, and very frequently I was asked for no payment at all.

“For whole days have I wandered, doubtful of the right path; and some days, where there

was no visible track, and without meeting one human creature—feeling, too, as if the foot of man had never before disturbed that rank and luxuriant herbage, nor scared the deadly cobra or other snakes—I was obliged to keep up a noise on purpose—from the tangled grass.

“It was often hard walking. I had to start at two in the morning to do fifteen miles before the sun was at its height, about ten or eleven—very cold when I started, having slept on the bare floor without a covering, and melting hot when I found a shady place to lie down. No one could walk fast, the foot sank into the dust, or the ankle bent in the wheel-rut; and sometimes at every step I had to clear some thick and matted herbage.

“I had now been three weeks, from the time I left the hospital, with no attendant, no solace, but my dog; and often have I thrown him bits to eat when I could have ate more myself. Where the country was inhabited I had enough to eat; but now the huts of the Mussulmans were few and far between, and no rice or chepatties were to be had.

“Various plans were now extemporised to suppress hunger. One was to drink more because I ate less: another plan was to keep the jaw moving with constant chewing, though

with nothing but the rind of trees. While in this stage of my trials I one day asked assistance from a Hindoo, probably in the station of an English yeoman. He cast an eye at my dog, and said: 'If really an object of charity, I should sell him: he would buy my dog; but as to giving, he would give nothing.' I cannot describe my feelings. It was like Crusoe parting from his Man Friday, though Mistake had caught little lately, and we were both growing thin together. I tried all I could, but all in vain. At last my hunger prevailed: for he turned, roughly and positively, to go away, and I called after him, and sold my poor dog for five rupees!

"I was now very wretched, but hunger, and indeed love of life, spurred me on; for not to reach a serai, and with no dog to guard me, seemed certain death. I had not proceeded above two miles before the faithful creature came after me, jumping up, and in an ecstasy of delight that made me value him more than ever. For half an hour I was delighted at the thought that some kindly Providence, acting by the instinct of the dog, had willed that two such friends should never part: but, at last, a man and horse were seen in the distance; my dog was claimed for the purchaser;

and I fancy at this moment I see poor Mistake hanging back till almost throttled by the string, in his vain attempts to prove true to me !

“ Trying as it is not to see the face, nor hear the voice, of your fellow-creatures, the sympathy of a dog forms no little solace to man. When I parted from my dog I had not only no companion, but I had nothing to speak to, so as to draw forth an involuntary whistle, or to make me hear the sound of my own voice. This was bad enough ; but I had, also, nothing to divert my gloomy thoughts. My mind became a chamber of horrors. Famine by day, and wild beasts by night—being strangled by Thugs or laid low by fever—these were, more and more, the phantoms of a dark and despondent mind ; when, to sum up all—enough to drive me mad—I passed through, resting one night and part of a day (the next stage being a short one) the old town of Nakmahal.

“ It will make you creep as I tell the tale, that in the outskirts of this town are the ruins of an old palace, with columns, shafts, and stones of ponderous size, all heaped together, and luxuriantly covered with plants, to which our nettles and briars are small as daisies in comparison. This ruin was pointed out as the den of a horrible boa constrictor, of

the largest size, and which fear, no doubt, painted larger still. Every native had a tale to tell of bullocks killed and 'hairbreadth 'scapes.' Sometimes it left its den, took to the river, and scared the fishermen—sometimes it landed miles below, and surprised the native in his rice-crops, so that the spirit of this fell enchanter haunted and darkly brooded over the whole neighbourhood. Had anybody assured me that the boa was at home, and safe amidst the ruins, then, after taking a wide circuit, I might have passed this horrid den, and travelled on secure; but think of the nerve that it required to plunge, at the very outset, into a tangled jungle, as the only route by which I could continue my journey!—looking hard and fearfully at every pendant bough, for fear it should be the enemy itself, ready to dart down and crush me in its coils!

"My five rupees for rice, fish, and chepaties, lasted many days, but when about a hundred and fifty miles from Calcutta they were all gone.

"One morning about eight o'clock, after four hours' walking, I sat down near the compound of an indigo-planter. No one came near enough to observe me, so at last—this cost me a desperate effort—I entered the compound, approached the choukadah in the verandah, and

for the first time enacted in all its painful features the degraded character of the needy beggar at the gate.

“I looked like a beggar, and nothing else ; but English beggars are rare in those parts, so I quickly caught the eye of one of the ladies, who was passing through the hall. Soon she sent a bearer, and the master followed. The sight of the ladies made me feel more than ever the depth of my degradation. However, though my voice was faint from exhaustion, and my utterance was choked with emotion, a few words told my story. The planter was from England, a plain man of business : from his white jacket and trowsers you would have taken him for a waiter at a sea-side hotel, but that is the usual morning dress of a gentleman in India. He shook his head, as much as to say that the son of an English gentleman ought never to have brought himself to this. However, he asked me to come into the breakfast-room and sit down with his family. I assured him I could not endure to meet the ladies ; my feelings and my spirits forbade. Then he kindly said he would send me some refreshment to the verandah, and would see me again before I left. These kind words drew many tears, at which a very pretty little girl, about four years of age, whom I had not ob-

served before, came up to me, and said, in a most innocent, artless tone :—

“ ‘ Wipe your pretty little eyes and don’t cry—pap-pa will give you nice breakfast.’ ”

“ This association with you, dear mother, and the days of my childhood, made me sob so convulsively, I went out into the garden to seek, like Joseph, where to weep.

“ My friend, the indigo-planter, sent me on in the cool of the evening, within an easy journey of the next serai, with a bottle of brandy-and-water and some provision, and I was once more on my travels.

“ There was nothing worth describing, either in my feelings or fortunes, till I reached the compound of one of the Company’s servants, about seventy miles from Calcutta. By that time my strength and spirits had been sinking lower and lower, my food all the time being very scanty, and many an hour did I resort to water and the rind of trees, not daring to give way to my sense of exhaustion ; for, in that lonely district, to stop short of a station was to die. And now my resolution and struggles for life had one day done their very utmost : when I sat down near the house of a Mr. Thompson, a Writer in the Presidency of Calcutta : he just caught sight of me—it was one

of his very busy days, and he was surrounded by a levee of planters, native clerks, and servants—and, after a hasty inquiry, he turned to a gentleman, who proved to be a doctor, and requested him to see what I wanted.

“No sooner did the doctor look at me than he felt my pulse, and called out hastily for brandy; he then brought me something to eat, and reported to Mr. Thompson that my system was so low, the wonder was my pulse hadn’t stopped altogether. Of course he was ordered to feed me up, and to take every care of me: and high time. The pains of hunger had gone off—starved away, I suppose—and the stage of numbness and apathy—for I could describe every symptom of death by starvation—had come on, and the doctor was only just in time to save me.

“I have often heard it said that there is nothing for nothing in this world. The most charitable persons I met with always hung back till they expected in return the satisfaction of doing me some permanent good.

“Mr. Thompson’s was a case in point. Late in the evening he heard my story, quite with that distant and negative expression of countenance which I had learnt almost naturally to look for—just as if my case were past all

curing, and he should only be feeding me to-day to die to-morrow—and a few rupees to get rid of me was all I expected; but the moment he heard me say, that if once I could reach Calcutta to get my letters, all would be well, he brightened up, and said,—

“ ‘That quite alters the case: if all you want is to tide over a temporary difficulty of that kind, cheer up, your hardships are at an end. I shall be sending a government boat to Calcutta in a fortnight—quite as soon as you will be fit to travel—so make yourself at home, and the doctor shall take care of you.’

“ He soon sent to my room some light linen clothes, and by the help of a razor I was company for him at his table, though I had hardly strength to sit up, and almost bewildered at my altered circumstances.

“ Next day, when I was in better spirits, he talked much about England, and finding out whence I came, he asked me if I knew Julia Armstrong; and I much suspect, that when he has his furlough next year, he hopes to make Julia Mrs. Thompson; so, there’s some news for you to tell her, dear mother, as I know you were always fond of these little affairs.

“ In due time he passed me on in a four-oared boat to Calcutta: his chief clerk went with me,

instructed not to leave me till he had taken me to the Post-office, and was able to report that I had received my letters from England.

"Arrived at Calcutta, the clerk took me to the Post-office, walking much faster than I was disposed to do ; for, the nearer I approached it the more nervous I became: and all the time the post-master was searching his pigeon-holes, saying, 'Langley, did you say? Is Langley the name, sir?' in the most hard and unsympathetic tone imaginable, I was ready to drop from fear there should be no letter for me; and, when I was opening your letter my hand shook so I could hardly hold it.

"However, when I read of an order for a hundred pounds I exclaimed, in spite of myself, 'Thank God! what a relief!' Just then the man said, 'Stay, here is another letter to the name of Langley,' giving me one I thought little of at the time, but which now I never shall forget. However, I sat down on the bench to breathe again and recover my nerve and composure, and then I told the clerk all was well, and I would write once more to thank Mr. Thompson for all his kindness.

"And here we parted, but the good news that I sent back was little indeed like the truth. Far

from being at the end of my trials, I was very near being only at the beginning of them!

“The letter, you know, contained an order, not on any bank, but on some house in Calcutta.

“You may guess what is coming. The order could not be paid—arrangements, they said, were making for some eventual liquidation. Instead of an order for money, it was merely making over to me a bad debt!

“I was almost struck to the earth by this discovery, and sitting down on a step to recover myself, and feeling as if there was a kind of fatality that hung over me, I began almost mechanically to open the other letter.

“Oh! mother, mother—bless that dear Miss Mildmay! I am sure she saved my life.

“The sun was streaming down upon me, and excited as I was, with no money to procure me shelter, I should have been soon laid low with another fever, and numbered with the unknown dead: but that dear creature’s letter was to this effect:—she enclosed me thirty-five pounds—ten pounds was a present to her godson; the other twenty-five I might accept with a quiet conscience, and repay her when I was rich!—Think of me ever being rich! That must be some of her merry sayings, indeed.—How-

ever, the ten pounds were soon spent : the other twenty-five pounds procured me the cheapest kind of passage, and that will account for the state of destitution in which you, dear mother, found me."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

HOW ONE LADY'S OPINIONS MAY BECOME A
LITTLE MORE CHARITABLE TOWARDS ANOTHER.

As soon as William Langley was able to leave his mother for a little while alone, he went with a polite message from her to thank Bella for all her kindness, and also to show the very different lot for which Bella had preserved him; — looking, indeed, like a most “prosperous gentleman.”

As to Bella, Minnie felt much at a loss how to act. Minnie was most desirous of forming a favourable opinion of her, because she felt that the extreme kindness shown to her poor son ought to place Bella on the footing of no ordinary acquaintance. She therefore requested Mrs. Williams to favour her with a brief interview at Natchet's.

“She is as good a woman as ever a lawful wife in London,” said Mrs. Williams, “though

she hasn't got her bit of a ticket. She takes on about Sir Edward, and says she's his for life, and will be true to him, and hopes to join him one of these days; and then, maybe, she may be made an honest woman of—for little chance is there of the like of him making a high and titled match for himself now. Yes, she says she would go, if it was only to nurse him, and see the last of him—for they say he is in a bad way, quite broken up—just as a real wife should do. But then, you see, ma'am, not having had the parson to begin it—ay, the man at the workhouse, said I, Bella, can write out a ticket, and make it all right now-a-days—people will talk; so, that does make a difference, doesn't it, ma'am?"

Minnie intimated that a solemn marriage made a great deal of difference; but as to a mere Union-ticket, how much better than nothing that might be she could not say.

However, Minnie had now learned all she desired as to the character of Bella. Tom Langley's favourable opinion was now confirmed; and Minnie's faith experienced the great truth, that the convictions of the mind are no little strengthened by the yearnings of the heart. Bella's desire to spend the rest of her days, owning the ties of love and of constancy, and still hoping for

a marriage, and that with one who so little deserved such devotion, seemed very consistent with Tom's assurance, that Bella's case was entitled to a very charitable construction.

Minnie, therefore, proposed to accompany Mrs. Williams back to May Fair, having first ascertained that certain articles would be a suitable present for Willie to offer to his friend in need.

Arrived at the house, Minnie heard a contest going on between Mrs. Williams and Bella. It was evident that Bella could not be persuaded—she instinctively recoiled from any personal interview with Minnie. This natural reluctance, and the cruel life that had caused it, flashed in a moment through the impulsive Minnie's mind, as she was standing at the half-opened door, whereupon she exclaimed:—

“But I *must* be allowed to thank one so truly generous to my dear boy;” and at the same moment—all heart and soul, her eyes beaming with that love and sympathy which Bella had not seen in any sister's look for many a long year—Minnie entered the room, and held Bella's hand in both of hers.

“My husband has told me all your trials and your troubles,” said Minnie; “but I do hope and trust it may be in our power to do a little for your future happiness. Your kindness I never can

forget. Mr. Langley will soon be in London. Consider how we can assist in any plans for your welfare."

Bella was quite overpowered, and said, all she wanted was to join Sir Edward on the Continent. She was not without hope that a promise, on which had hung all her happiness, would then be fulfilled.

After entering a little into the detail of this plan, Minnie asked Bella to accept Willie's presents. Still, there was one feeling of reserve Minnie must yet surmount—one nerve in Bella's heart remaining to be touched: so, after repeated assurances of every exertion in her behalf, Minnie ended by saying—this cost Minnie an effort to add—that she deeply regretted she had no longer a home to which to invite her for a while, mindful as she ever must be of that tender care long since shown to the father, and now so feelingly to the son.

CHAPTER XXIX.

HOW LOVE IS OF THE NATURE OF A LUXURY AND
AN EXTRAVAGANCE, AND THOSE WHO CAN'T
AFFORD .IT MUST NOT THINK OF IT.

EVERYBODY came to congratulate Minnie on the end of her painful anxieties, and the return of her son. Indeed, it was for some weeks quite a pleasure to see them together. They were always walking about, and so happy in each other's company, that they were once taken at a distance, as seen from the top of the cliff, for two lovers, each deeply interested in the other's tale, instead of only a mother and a son pacing up and down the sands.

So, now that the Cottage had been accommodated for the lost son's reception, and he was seen working with his father in the garden, and going on errands with his sisters, all looked so peaceful and quiet, that no doubt many of the Eastmouth people thought that, at the Cottage at least, the great secret of life had been solved at

last. As to Willie, after all his trials and hardships, it was natural to suppose that the life must be a luxury to him. Schooled as he had been in the best of all practical lessons, philosophy and contentment—what more could they want? Leave well alone, and be happy?

But such is not the way of this world.

The same Providence that has sentenced us to this great penal settlement, to work on the high road of life, and all of us in chains!—though chains they are that are made lighter and lighter in proportion as we conform to the rules of Him who has laid them on us—the same has made this round world like one vast treadmill, so planned that we should never rest, but keep ever striving to mount up and up. Each step that we take makes us feel in an instant no higher than before, having only gained a footing to something still beyond; for, not to advance, has all the sensation of falling back. So truly is this world like one great House of Correction—one great Reformatory—in which no able-bodied offender is ever allowed to stand still. We have each been sentenced to undergo so many turns upon this toilsome wheel; before the term of our probation being over, we receive our final discharge, and go “where the wicked cease from troubling, where the weary are at rest.”

And first, Sophy began to feel that the Cottage was too small, and Eastmouth too confined, for all the yearnings and aspirations of her dear little heart.

All had gone on very steadily for a long time, and the said little heart was the most contented heart possible, until Captain Haslop of the Guards, being on a visit at his father's, sauntered down one summer's evening, after dinner, to be shown the truly picturesque Cottage, and the very interesting tenants in this corner of the hereditary estate.

The Captain fixed his eye on Sophy, and kept it fixed quite as long—perhaps longer—than was usual. In a minute or two Sophy looked up, and the same eye was on her again. Next day the Captain came again to the Cottage, to see something more of their ingenious arrangements. He had another talk with the father; and even contrived to get up an interest in some observations made by the mother, too. Soon it was observed—and Eastmouth people had nothing else to do but to hear and to tell of the doings of the Langleys, “who lived in a cottage, and yet held their heads up high enough for any mansion around the place,”—it was observed that Captain Haslop met Sophy so frequently as to run the theory of undesigned coincidences

rather too hard ; and Minnie, ever on the alert in such matters, found that Sophy's eye was always in one direction—Sophy's thoughts always about the doings at the Baronet's—and soon, that her interest extended to military affairs in general.

Now, then, it was full time for Minnie to begin to lecture Sophy about inequality of position, and how cottages looked very small to those used to mansions, and how mere romantic attachments for those not born with a silver fork and spoon at nature's table, were an expensive kind of luxury, which all who could not afford must have the good sense to go without.

However, though Minnie went through all this lecture with earnest look and serious countenance ; still, in the evening, when Minnie and Tom were walking on the sands alone, they could not but confess that it made their hearts ache to think of the life of disappointment which the two dear girls, they feared, were destined to endure !

From this time Sophy lost her happy looks, and Tom and Minnie, with all their philosophy, found cottage-life had its drawbacks, and they could not help an occasional sigh for that which had been but was no more.

Of course, all this time Tom and Minnie were

growing older, one of the earliest symptoms of which is a want of elasticity and hopeful spirits, while household comforts become more and more necessary. Labour and exertion lose their former zest and interest, and a man on the wrong side of fifty would rather walk about and direct than use the hatchet or the spade.

This also made their rebellious thoughts fly more and more frequently far—far away—to another state of things.

And now Willie was well and strong; no longer the broken-down invalid from India, but a fine active and high-spirited young man. The natural force of that powerful constitution that could alone have saved him from feeding the vultures and the jackals in the jungles of Hindostan, now began to assert its youthful fire and energy. This was natural enough—his trials and sufferings were nearly forgotten. The sense of comparative security was pleasure enough at first, but this had died away. It was now some positive happiness—progress—advancement—action—love and life, that could alone engage the restless spirit of William Langley.

There is a fable of the man who cherished the snake in his bosom; harmless because numbed at first; but when once it was warmed it stung him. So it is with those whose proper

nature—we speak not here of any viperous or vicious dispositions—is numbed by chill penury, or the wintry blasts of angry fortune. For a while you hope all things of them. It is so easy to satisfy them—anything you can offer will be abundant, and they will be grateful to you for evermore.

Just try them!

No sooner do they grow warm in their nests, than all the erratic wriggings and rebellious turns and twists of their nature break out anew. Nothing is good enough: they angrily ignore every reminder of their former state—and, in short, nature speaks powerfully from within. They would hardly say “thank ye” for what they have: they are so sharp-set on what they hope for—nay, they would rather risk at the cannon’s mouth the identical heads that had given you so much trouble, than hear of anything like still-life in the ranks, and no promotion.

Nearly five years had by this time passed away, since rest and retirement were words that dropped like balm on the troubled spirits of the Langley family; and now the same words suggested ideas widely different—of daughters “born to blush unseen,” and a son far removed from those busy haunts of men that alone could encourage any hope of keeping him out of mis-

chief for the present, or of affording an independence for years to come.

In other words, Willie Langley was becoming troublesome, and, we must pity the feelings of those parents who have the consciousness of having reared a youth with tastes that cannot be gratified—with ideas for a sphere he cannot reach—with a stylish figure to wear shabby clothes—and luxurious habits as a kind of nettle-bed on which to grow crop upon crop of prickly notions and stinging expectations for the full term of his natural life.

The Captain paid another visit; was again and again at the Cottage; and poor Sophy, when he went away to join his regiment, grew pale, abstracted, silent, and so indifferent to all about her, that Julia also was fast losing her once happy spirits from sympathising with the melancholy that brooded over her sister.

It was evident that the Haslop family were alive to the danger of trusting the Captain—a fine open-hearted young man, and heir to the estate—too much in the direction of the Cottage. The usual invitations to archery or to spend a friendly evening—the only invitations that Tom would ever allow his family to accept—were now significantly suspended, and certain words that were repeated to Minnie made her

sensibly feel that that alliance would be shunned, from the very association with "the Cottage," which might have been countenanced with any home as sonorous as Langley Hall.

Neither Tom nor Minnie were at all disposed to think lightly of the deep and pensive melancholy that was feeding on the roses of Sophy's beauty—beauty, indeed, there was for them to be proud of. Sophy was of a tall and elegant figure, like her mother; with regular features, beautiful complexion, and finely-flowing, nut-brown hair. This will convey, not the likeness, but the style, if we light up the whole with radiant intelligence and a tremulous ripple of softly-playing smiles.

"But poor people have no business to be beautiful. A family down in the world has no possible right to think about it. Besides, it is worldly—it is vanity—and something wholly unworthy of any properly-brought-up young lady to think about."

Such is the doctrine of thousands of ladies, who do not break their own looking-glasses—not even in disgust and disappointment—all the same.

Still, if Tom and Minnie did happen to be gifted with an eye for a beautiful girl as for a beautiful flower—if they did enjoy a certain

sense and sentiment, therefrom arising, as they would enjoy any other blessing of Providence, we can only say that we heartily sympathise with them in their sensations, and more particularly still in their wish to preserve that beauty—from the ravages of sorrow, at all events—as long as they could.

We have no sympathy with the dull, insensate beings, who speak of beauty as nothing—who can see in a noble woman's love no impulse to noble action—nothing to exalt and inspire the heart of cold and selfish man. What is a true-hearted woman's devotion but the richest treasure with the least alloy? What is it but a spark of heavenly fire? What but the pure effluence of eternal love surviving the shock of fallen nature, and enshrined, as an undying Vestal flame, in the bosom of God's fairest creatures?

Can we, then, avowing these our thoughts, and seeing nothing more worldly in a beautiful woman than in an ugly one, refuse the passing tribute of a sigh to Tom and Minnie, having feelings so natural, since they knew the cause and hourly saw the merciless effect on their unhappy daughter?

It is easy to talk lightly of a love affair gone off and come to nothing; of "lighting

up another flame to put out this:" but we seriously believe that no misfortune so darkly clouds the happiness of a whole family — none tears to shreds the finer sentiments, or does the work of the spoiler, in the pure shrine of a true and loving woman's soul — half as much as what is termed a "disappointment."

Rather would we see the daughter of our love a frantic maniac, if, by twelve months in one of those asylums which cast a gloom over the traveller as he passes by, we could be sure she would come forth without a trace of the past affliction — rather this — ay, ten times told! — than see that life-long wreck of mind and feeling which we have witnessed—who has not?—where some fond, confiding girl, has poured freely forth the treasures of a devoted heart, and after months of agony and suspense, of love and doubt, and fear and frenzy, has been forced, oh, how hardly, how unwillingly! to believe that, for the prismatic colours of sunny happiness, she has grasped but the damp, cold drop of disappointed love!

Young men, beware how you idly trifle! Parents, be watchful, too! Some may be "pardoned their bad hearts for their worse brains;" otherwise, loud and deep are the curses due to that guilty head. We speak feelingly on this point, and therefore say with Sir Walter,—

“ Where shall the traitor rest,
He the deceiver,
Who could win lady's love,
Ruin and leave her ?

The eagle her wing shall flap
O'er the false-hearted,
His warm blood the wolf shall lap,
Ere life be parted.
Shame and dishonour sit
On his grave ever ;
Blessings shall hallow it
Never, oh ! never ! ”

And, added to the other misfortunes of the Langley family, was so great a trial really pending for the fond parents and loving Julia to witness, and for the heartbroken Sophy to endure ?

“ I recollect,” said Sir J. Herschel, “ an anecdote told me by a highly-respected inhabitant of Windsor, as a fact that he could personally testify, having occurred in a village where he resided several years, and where he actually was at the time it took place. The blacksmith of the village had got hold of Richardson's novel of *Pamela : or, Virtue Rewarded* ; and used to read it aloud in the long summer evenings, seated on his anvil, and never failed to have a large and attentive audience. It a pretty long-winded book, but they fairly listened to it all.

“ At length, when the happy turn of fortune arrived, which brings the hero and the heroine together, the crowd of rustics were so delighted as to raise a great shout, and, procuring the church keys, actually set the parish bells ringing.”

Now, it is a cruel thing to have to disappoint such generous feelings; and though we can easily imagine the sympathetic reader would feel much inclined to do the same as the blacksmith's delighted audience, still, we do not think that they are quite prepared for the discovery we have to make in another chapter.

CHAPTER XXX.

HOW PERSONS MAY COME FACE TO FACE, WHO
NEVER THOUGHT TO MEET AGAIN.

BUT first we would mention that, about this time, anxious to relieve our old friends of part of their burthen, in a little while we sent an invitation to Willie, who came to visit us at Arminster; and we were agreeably surprised to find how much sense and goodness there was in him. What school had not taught him, the world had: and we began to form a favourable opinion of his qualifications to attend to any employment within his powers to undertake.

It was during this visit that there occurred one of the most curious coincidences we ever remember — one that fully exemplifies the saying that *fact* is more strange than fiction. However, Herodotus sensibly remarks, that nothing is too improbable to happen — any strange combinations may result in course of time: so, the

reader may concede to us — as the climax of Willie's strange adventures — the following remarkable incident, as no more than our share.

The incident is one that enables us to satisfy a question which will naturally arise, as to whether William Langley ever heard more of that infamous Captain Hawton, who deserted him so barbarously, and almost left him to starve, in the sun-parched solitudes of Northern India.

One day we had parted from Willie for a short time in the town of Arminster ; and when we met again near the door of the Chapter Inn, he came hurrying up, in a state of remarkable excitement, and said,—

“ I have been looking for you, to make sure I have not mistaken my man ; but I am almost positive I have seen the villain who was almost the death of me in India.”

It is true, we had heard with painful interest every part of Willie's sad adventures ; still, we did not immediately conjecture whom he meant, or to what he referred.

“ Is there any man of the name of Hawton in this place ? ” he continued.

“ Certainly ; Captain Hawton, lately from India — a mere passing acquaintance of ours, that is all.”

“ Then that is the very man to whose false

and treacherous conduct I owe all my sufferings ! He little thought I should ever live to make him rue it ; but I will be after him at once."

"Not quite so fast, Willie," was the reply ; "deeply as we sympathise with your feelings of resentment and indignation at your wrongs, most wrongs have their own peculiar remedy, and this it requires consideration to suggest ; though some wrongs, especially after years have passed away, admit of no remedy at all."

In this manner we contrived to detain him, and to afford him time to cool, which in Willie's case was highly necessary indeed : for he was a powerful young man, of high spirit, and very excitable ; so we felt sure that a fearful collision would result from any further provocation, if any should be ventured, on the part of a man who had so basely injured him already.

We succeeded in leading him home for the day, and then we had full leisure for deciding on a wise and judicious course of action—the best that so unprecedented a case could admit.

William Langley was hard, indeed, to convince : that it should be possible that a man could be deserted falsely, treacherously, and with malice aforethought, and left with almost the certainty of starving, as every Indian officer must know full well, and yet nothing be done to

such a malefactor after all! It is natural that this should, at first thoughts, seem incredible indeed.

However, he saw at last that only two courses were at all worth considering.

One was, as we said, to grapple with him in mortal conflict, and wring his caitiff head off his shoulders.

This, of course, save in a metaphorical sense, was not very likely to be successful. A mob, a policeman, a summons, and binding over to keep the peace, would doubtless show the impotence of all his fury.

The other, and the only practicable course, was to follow the dignified example of Dido, when, after her very cruel breach of promise of marriage case—the first on record—she cut *Æneas* dead, and left him to the tender mercies of his own most uncomfortable reflections in the shades below.

After a while, Willie saw the matter in its proper light, and agreed that it were more satisfactory for to do nothing, than to do nothing adequate to so serious an offence. The fact that there are two sides to every question, and that where accusation and defence are alike unsupported by evidence, the more unscrupulous of the two is likely to make out the more plausible case: this we did not venture to hint, though

worldly experience had long since taught us that this was a point by no means to be overlooked.

After this, William Langley walked about Arminster as usual, claiming fully to be trusted, even should Hawton stand before him in a posture the most inviting of attack.

While things were in this state, and William appeared to us to have fully digested all his choler and resentment, we happened to walk together into the Arminster reading-room, where the only person present at the time was Hawton.

William looked so composedly towards us, that our confidence in him was at that moment confirmed, otherwise we could not have ventured, as we did, on so bold a step as we shall now relate.

First of all, we bowed to Hawton, saying audibly and distinctly, " Good morning, Captain Hawton !"

Shortly after, with equal ease and distinctness, we enunciated the name of Langley.

And how did the two—the traitor and the betrayed—how did they behave? How did they look?

The picture was one of the most extraordinary and the most interesting we ever beheld.

On one side of the table sat Captain Hawton, hiding his face over his newspaper, yet trying in vain to conceal his confusion.

On the other side stood William Langley—

bold, upright, and defiant: saying plainly by his very look and attitude, "Yes; you know me. Here I am—you little thought to set eyes on me again."

After a few minutes we left the room, as before intended, saying as we went—"Wait here ten minutes, Langley, and I will return without fail."

In the door of the Arminster club-room there is, as is very common, a glass panel—we could not resist the temptation of stepping aside for one last look at two men brought so wonderfully together, and with feelings the most curious to contemplate. They remained each motionless as before. After about five minutes, Hawton rose and left the room, and as William Langley soon left Arminster he never saw Hawton again.

Captain Hawton went home to the friend with whom he was residing, and to whose sister he was engaged to be married. From them we afterwards ascertained that he never mentioned the name of Langley, or gave vent to his feelings by—what with an innocent man would have been almost unavoidable—by offering any kind of justification, or making any reference to so extraordinary a meeting.

CHAPTER XXXI.

HOW THE SUNS BURSTS OUT AMIDST THE DARKEST
CLOUDS.

FROM the pathetic causes on which we have already enlarged, "The Cottage" was fast losing every feature of a happy home. Sophy could enjoy little diversion by day, and not much rest by night. Julia was weighed down by the troubles of Sophy. Willie was disgusted and out of heart with himself and all around him. And Tom and Minnie had, like most other fathers and mothers, their own troubles to bear, and those of their children too.

It was now proposed—in the way of a little diversion, and a short relief to Tom and Minnie—as also to try the effect of a change of scene—that Charlotte Mildmay should take care of the disconsolate Sophy.

The reply received from Charlotte was rather mysterious; namely, that, happy as she should

be to receive her dear Sophy, yet she should, unfortunately, be absent from home for a week : but things were taking such a turn—as she hoped soon to have the pleasure of explaining—that by the time she returned the sad necessity for Sophy's visit, and the cloud that hung over her, might possibly have passed away. She added, yet more enigmatically, that, doubtless they had not forgotten the old prophecy of Gipsy Hester—still in the same neighbourhood—which prophecy was in a fair way of becoming true

Here was a puzzle, indeed ! What could it mean ? Tom said that he had an indistinct impression of certain dark hints and ambiguous expressions thrown out, he scarcely remembered by whom—and now the question glanced across his mind, whether these hints had any connexion with Charlotte's mysterious reply ?

However, since this was a difficulty for time only to explain, all they could do was to wait patiently, and hope for the best, while Willie set off for Arminster on a visit to us.

Charlotte's letter, of course, was read again and again—with every imaginable commentary and ingenious solution ; the result was, that Sophy and Julia grew very sanguine—and naturally so, for, “the world was all before them”

—all new and untried—their aerial castles had not yet failed from bad foundations; and as to that inheritance in Hope, Romance, and Expectancy, which is the birthright of all of us, it was not yet “gone and spent.” So, if not positively happy, they were, at least, hallucinated, all the week. But Tom and Minnie were not so easily elated: they were becoming more like the heavier kind of birds, which are very slow in taking wing and overcoming the gravitation of this dull earth.

A correspondence had for some time been going on with Foster, as to finding employment for Willie.

For some time every letter had been curiously scanned, to see if perchance it contained anything further to elucidate the mystery which held them all in suspense. Charlotte’s week had passed clear away—a second week, and a third, had seriously undermined their faith in lucky stars; and now a fourth week had almost reconciled their minds to the common course of things—when a letter from London, with a large official seal, made the eyes of Sophy and Julia sparkle as they beheld it; and even Tom’s hand shook as he cut it open.

The letter was to announce that an appointment in a public office had been granted to

Willie. So far well, indeed. But by the next post came another letter from Foster, to the effect that an allowance of about 130% a-year must be made him, to enable him to live suitably for the first three years, at all events—a demand impracticable, of course !

Deeper and deeper in the mire ! Alas, poor Tom and Minnie ! How many are the forms in which the baneful seed we suffer to float around us, light as gossamer, in our idle, thoughtless humour, shoot up as stubborn thistles in our path !

This disappointment was, indeed, too tantalising, far too much to bear : they were now knocked down, and out of heart, for Willie was the greatest trouble and difficulty of all. Minnie could hardly look at him from the window, as he sauntered about, idle and dispirited, while she knew that everybody was commenting on “that great hulking fellow living on his poor father and mother, and doing nothing :” indeed, one report was, that his extravagance had been the cause of all their trouble ; and now even the hope—yes, Hope, that solace to the wretched—that sunshine when all is dark—that swelling billow that heaves many a wayfarer over the sunken rock—that spur and stimulus of timely strength till nature gathers power to

stand the shock that threatens us — yes, even Hope had fled away — when — when ——

Silently opening the little rustic gate, and printing with tiny footsteps the velvet turf, straight to those folding-windows that served so elegantly for cottage-door, approached a little lady. Her date, it is true, was mediæval; yet was she blessed, as the perpetual rose, with never-failing loveliness; when, as if a veritable fairy had appeared, one thrill of joy shot through the desponding circle, and “Charlotte Mildmay! Charlotte Mildmay!” was the cry that heralded in this messenger of mercy — for such, true to her life-long character, she now at length proved to be.

The secret that Charlotte Mildmay years before had longed to tell — the fact which was implied in the loan so seasonably volunteered to Willie, to be repaid when he was rich — the thought that underlay certain mysterious expressions thrown out in Smugglers’ Lane to Gipsy Hester, shrewd enough to frame a prophecy in unison — the private information possessed and hinted by Fred Audrey and his father, while discussing Tom Langley’s settlement — the reflection which reconciled their minds to Tom’s extravagance, knowing, as they did, that after a few years all would come right

again — the same which also told them that, with or without a fortune from her father, Minnie would one day bring a fair equivalent to their client — that secret information was briefly this :

— That a childless relative of Mrs. Chester, disgusted at the Chester extravagance, had quarrelled with the family, made a will, and some time after had become hopelessly imbecile. In this will drawn by Audrey, testator being unwilling — as men who have worked hard for the money they leave behind them usually are — to contemplate the heap so many years in piling up being, perhaps, levelled in a day, had settled some 20,000*l.*, in safe investments, upon Minnie Chester, in whom, as a child, he had always evinced the greatest interest.

This old gentleman had for years been taken care of by a single sister, who, finding the secret of the will (which she had opened and read) too much for one, eased her mind by telling her particular friend, Charlotte Mildmay — to tell whom, she pleaded, was like telling nobody at all ; and Charlotte, finding all the relief that her sympathetic nature required in throwing out casual hints, had contrived to keep the secret bodily to herself.

At the time Charlotte's letter had raised the sanguine hopes of Sophy and of Julia, the old

man was at his last: still, he lingered on; and, till he was actually dead, and Audrey had declared that the will, one copy of which was in his keeping, admitted of no kind of doubt—Charlotte wisely denied herself the pleasure of this gratifying visit to her old friends.

Of all the emotions produced by this joyous news, no heart palpitated as much as Sophy's.

With the rest it was certain relief—happiness positive and in possession.

With Sophy, distraction arose from the reflection, "Will *he* come forward? Is this prosperity to my family to give effect to honourable intentions—to open the ready way where now exists the impatient will—or, is it only sent to make plain, beyond the delusive flattery of confiding love, that he never yet glowed with the sentiment he has inspired in me?"

As to Minnie, she declared at once she saw in this the hand of a merciful and all-wise Providence. Often had they remarked at the Cottage, "How wealthy we were at Langley Hall, if we had had but our present experience!—Providence has made us poor, as the simplest way of making rich!"

And now the lease was nearly out. How gratifying to return, all the wiser for their lesson, no more to *Hard-up* Hall—no more as the

ancient race of the *O'Calagans*— but to live in thankfulness to God, and in equity and loving-kindness towards His humblest creatures!

On the evening of this happy day, when Tom and Minnie found themselves alone, Minnie— when both had been for some time silent— said,—

“There is some one of whom I was thinking, my dear.”

“Poor Bella Johnson?” suggested Tom.

“I should like to do something for her.”

“And I too, with all my heart—it has long been one of the most painful reflections of my life, that Bella once wrote to me for assistance, and all I could afford her was not worth naming.”

“If we could but send her over to Sir Edward, and induce him to marry her?”

* * * * *

Two years after, on the pier at Boulogne, a friend of Tom Langley saw a lady tenderly watching over a broken-down and paralysed husband in a chair.—He recognised the calm but care-worn Bella, and the pale and distorted features of Sir Edward Alex.

Vows of amendment, and of playing the drama of life all the better for this most improving rehearsal, with plans and resolutions innu-

merable — not only made, the reader will briefly understand, but also prudently carried out — were now the order of the day. One thing Minnie declared positively should be done — she would endeavour for the future to command her husband's confidence in pecuniary affairs, and carry out the wise maxim taught by Charlotte Mildmay at the time of their marriage, when she urged her "never to let a husband's misfortunes come upon her unawares."

"Ah! my dear Tom," she exclaimed, "this was the cause of all your sorrow. Had I but seen the income upon one page and the expenditure on the other, I can truly say that not one penny of debt should you ever have incurred. However little you had, I would have lived on less; and no temptation to model-farming or to railway speculations would then have had power to draw you in."

Well done, Minnie! the wife of many a ruined man has truly said the same.

It were long to tell how all Eastmouth congratulated, or how all exaggerated on this happy occasion. Indeed, the reputed fortune grew so fast, that in a few weeks more, at such a rate, Minnie would have been a millionaire at least. However, that the fortune was large enough to

enable them to return to Langley Hall, there was now no doubt; and — as even civilised people worship the rising sun — Sophy, to her great joy, heard of an invitation for all the family to dine in a friendly way at Sir Elwyn Haslop's. The Captain was not at home on that occasion; but his sister conveyed to Sophy some very pretty message, which — as Julia innocently expressed it, to Charlotte's great amusement (for, Charlotte knew every twinge and symptom of a heart-complaint) — “made Sophy a great deal worse.”

CHAPTER XXXII.

A CHAPTER WHICH THE AUTHOR HUMBLY HOPES
—AS HE ALSO HOPES OF THE WHOLE OF THIS
EVENTFUL HISTORY—THAT IT WILL DO EVERY
ONE'S HEART GOOD TO READ.

WHEN the day drew near to leave the Cottage, there were not a few little ways and snuggeries that they felt sorry to be about to leave. Both Minnie and Tom made some very appropriate and becoming remarks about happiness not being more often found in large houses than in small: though, Sophy slyly whispered to Julia, she was very sure they were all uncommonly glad to try. Still, as we once knew a lady, during a voyage from India, so reconciled to her little cabin, that she felt it a loss of comfort to quit—we can imagine that, as the Langley family looked their last on their pretty cottage, they could enter into the spirit of the poor prisoner of Chillon, who said—to give the famous French translation—

“Je quittais mon prison avec regret.”

All Brendon was delighted to hear of the return of the Langleys to Langley Hall. The Conways, who had rented their house, were not very popular. They had no real interest in the place or people, whereas every generation of the Langleys had looked upon the village as their own. They would encourage the good, scold the bad, give medicine for the sick, coals to the shivering, and soup to the poor. It was remembered also, that they spent even more than they could afford in the old family house, and were indeed "very proper sort of gentlefolk."

There is also a charming excitement and a romantic interest very widely felt at any sudden change of fortune. It sets hope on the wing, and makes all who hear it begin castle-building. We rejoice in the idea that life is a lottery yet, and who can say but just such another prize may be in store for ourselves?

The people were therefore determined to give them a cordial and hearty reception, and had already begun to consider how they should do it, when the Rector announced that he had received a present from Mrs. Langley, for the villagers to make merry on the occasion.

Fred Audrey was not long in speaking to a few of the neighbours, and — as balls and archery-meetings were scarce, and anything

would serve for a gathering — there was a general disposition to make a Brendon holiday, and to celebrate the return to Langley Hall.

Of course some old friends had passed away. There were new tombs for the Langleys to see in Brendon churchyard—one to old Mr. Audrey included—and one or more gaps in several family circles; still there were people enough who remembered with pity Minnie's sorrow when the Chester family came to grief, and there was a general feeling of friendly satisfaction that Mrs. Langley had now the happiness to retrieve the losses of her kind and indulgent husband.

Fred Audrey duly notified the day on which the old house was to be ready for their reception, and, in concert with the gentry on the one hand and the farmers on the other, he arranged that full effect should be given to the generous sympathies of both rich and poor.

It was about six o'clock, one beautiful summer's afternoon, that a carriage, containing the Langley family, drove up to the Chapter Inn at Arminster, and, after happy greetings from mine host, requested fresh horses.

Farmer Thorold came forward, followed by Mr. Lancaster's servant, to say that, while he claimed the honour of conveying all the luggage

in his cart, a carriage was at the disposal of Mr. Langley, sent by Mr. Lancaster, who was himself waiting to greet the family at Brendon.

This kind offer being accepted, four horses, with postilions, galloped away merrily with the four inside and William Langley on the box. Minnie felt strangely-contending emotions; but the son and daughters were all excitement, as if it were quite "grand" and "gloriously fine fun."

And now, as they near the village of Brendon, they see no little dust a-head, and all the flags of all the clubs, from the Odd Fellows to the Rechabites, waving in the air, with heads out of every window or cottage-door, and arches of evergreens, and "Welcome Home!" "Long Life!" "Happiness!" "Peace and Plenty!" for their mottoes. At the same time there gathered around the carriage quite a cavalcade of farmers' horses—the more dust the more honour, they supposed, no doubt.

Poor Minnie's heart began to throb at the thought of the scene to come.

"There is no helping it," said Tom: "be firm—brace yourself up for the occasion—look as like holiday as you can."—"Stay! but what is this?" he said, as the carriage was stopped at the turnpike-gate.

Quickly the horses were taken out by the rustics, a long cart-rope appeared for traces, and a general scramble commenced for the honour of a pull or push behind; and forthwith a "drawing-in" was enacted, in all its comical and grotesque particulars.

Meanwhile an elderly woman, whose garb was a distinct and picturesque costume, differing wonderfully from the pitch-fork toilet of the draggle-tailed labourers' wives, made her way up to the carriage-window with a marvellous fluency and flippancy of tongue, and said:—

"Ah! my leddy. Come true at last, my leddy! Didna I say so — four-and-twenty years ago came Michaelmas? *You were born to be happy, but with clouds between——*"

"That is Gipsy Hester, I declare!" exclaimed Minnie. "Oh! Charlotte Mildmay, this is your doing,—some of your little plans to give us pleasure, no doubt."

And you, my young leddy," continued Hester, "I could tell your fortune too — there's a fine handsome young gentleman ——"

But here, while Tom told Hester, in dumb-show, to come up to the house, the crowd and the noise that accompanied the "drawing-in" put an end to this ancient Sibyl's song.

Minnie saw Sophy's eye sparkle at the sound of so much good news ; and shortly after something seemed to catch Sophy's eye in the crowd — she uttered an audible exclamation, and sat back in the carriage as if not to betray any feeling to her mother.

If a little diversion could assist either Sophy or her mother on this trying occasion, just then there was plenty of it.

For, Johnny Lloyd, long remembered as the Silly Billy of the parish—as fat as he was foolish, and always ludicrously clad in some Stultze-made cast-off coat, with buttons bursting off, and with trowsers half up his legs—was now seen uproarious, and desperately fighting for the rope. “Be off, you crazy fellow!” cried one farmer. “He'll spoil it all!” said another. “No, no,” cried Willie, who had a lively sense of the ridiculous, “do pray let Johnny have a pull:” whereupon a long spare coil was dropped from the shoulder of the foremost. Johnny caught it up and started six yards in advance of all, and strided away frantically happy in so conspicuous a post of honour ; the first to turn the corner up to the Hall—and this was the signal for suspending all the pole-climbing, sack-races, and other rural sports—and the first to lead the way through hundreds of people, shouting, huzzaing,

laughing and gibing, and blending the decorous and the ridiculous in about the customary proportions.

No sooner had they arrived at the Hall than they found all their old friends assembled, and with the now venerable and aged Rector at their head, ready to give "his daughter"—so he delighted to call Minnie—his blessing. He handed her from the carriage first; and then, just as Sophy was stepping out, an elegant young man, in undress uniform, advanced in a way that took all by surprise, and with a very graceful inclination, offered his hand to Sophy!

This was Captain Haslop.

* * * * *

It soon appeared that Minnie's benefaction, increased by the Rector and their other friends, had resulted in a rural feast to the old people in a barn, while a tent was pitched for the ladies and gentlemen, with an elegant entertainment, after they had assisted their village friends.

"This is overpowering," said Minnie; "how can we possibly go through it?"

"Trust me, my dear lady," said the Rector. "I am guilty of bringing upon you this painful pleasure, and you must look to me to help you out of it."

"Yes," said Mrs. Farren, "your husband

won't have any speech to make. The Rector would find words for all England—though there were nothing at all to say—I do really believe he would ; ay, in the middle of the night, if you were to awake him.”

“Bless you, my child !” said old Mrs. Holland, tottering on her husband’s arm. “Well, this is a happy day to see ! Why, it is better than if you had never *failed*—never left us, I mean. And Sophy, I see, has met with a beau— isn’t he, dear ? Well, this is a happy, happy day ! not many of the sort that I have ever met with in my long life.”

The Rector led in Minnie, and Captain Haslop had offered his arm—we may say, his *hand*—to the blushing Sophy.

And now the health of Mr. and Mrs. Langley was proposed by Mr. Lancaster, with hearty congratulations on their return to Langley Hall.

The Rector then arose, his white locks and ruddy, healthful countenance, presenting a picture of the village pastor, fresh and active to the last.

“It is hardly fair,” he said, “to overpower our friend with our sympathies, and then to expect of him words to speak the o’erflowing heart. I know what he would say, and I am well enough

acquainted with the lives of Mr. and Mrs. Langley for the five years that have passed, to know what may to their praise and honour be said of them. The change from rich to poor, and now once more from poor to rich, is a lesson for us all. What they have suffered should make us all feel very guilty. It is what there are few, indeed, but have equally deserved. Yes; in this mortal state, frail creatures that we are, our very virtues are too apt to betray us.—What is more laudable than a generous emulation and a public spirit—a desire to uphold not only the proprieties, but even the refinements and the elegancies of life?—What do we respect more than hospitality, and a liberal friend and neighbour? Yet how naturally, how insidiously do these kindly feelings prove cruel snares—hampering us with debt and difficulty—inducing us to pledge and lock up all our means in outward style and fashion, and to keep too small a reserve to do justice to our better feelings! Thus it is that we tie the hand of charity—and that we point the sting of little money cares, till all the Christian duties of justice, equity, and loving-kindness towards all our fellow-creatures, become too hard for mortal man to practise.

“Our friends have now returned, to our great joy, doubly rich—rich in the things of this

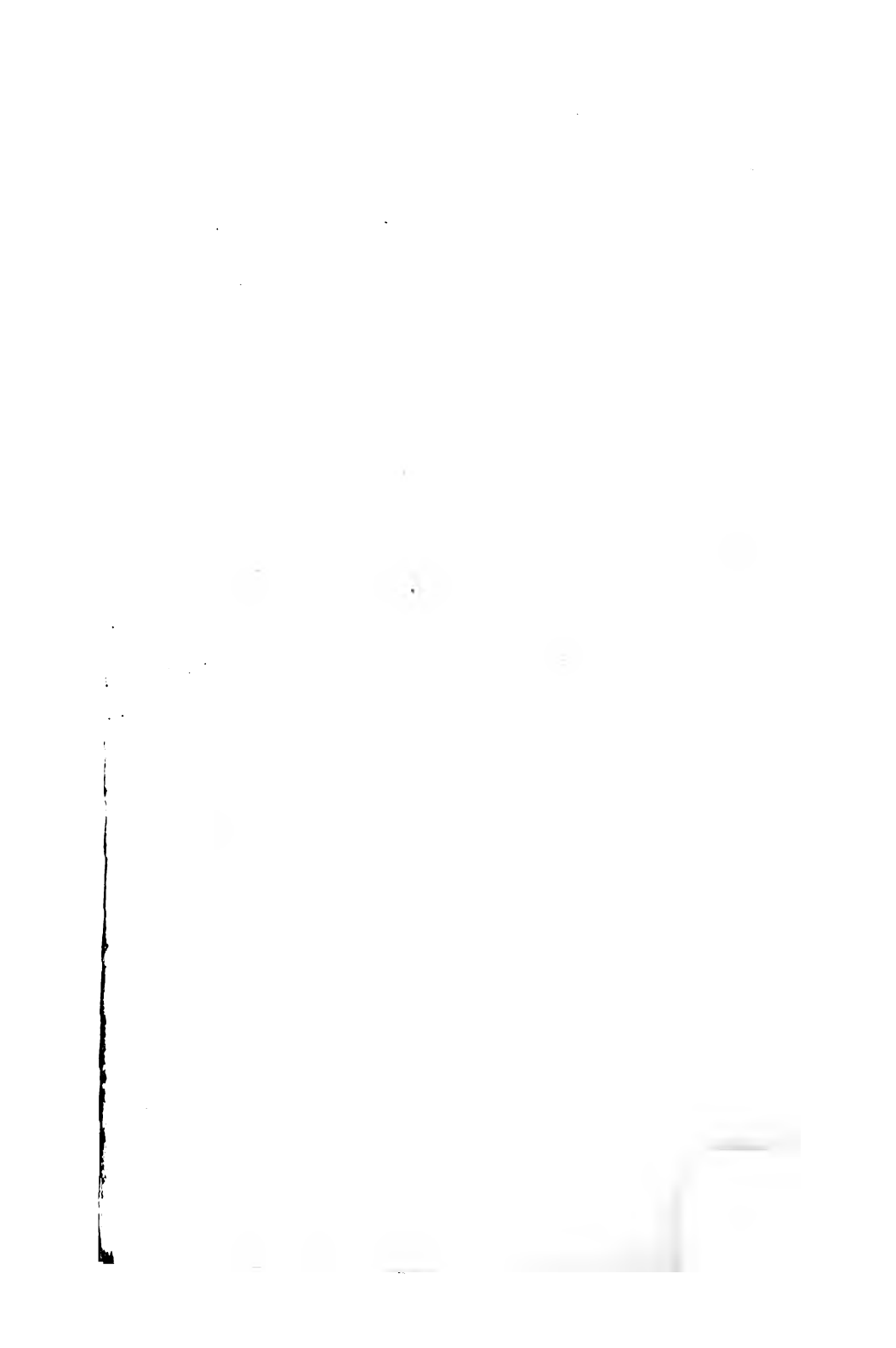
world, but yet more rich in wisdom and experience; and we heartily pray for all those blessings that may be good for them. The season of their so-called misfortunes has been, I am well assured—and this is by no means uncommonly the case—the happiest time in their lives: and may the rest of their course on the ocean of life be as calm and smooth as in this troublous sphere it can ever be—as they have now weathered *Agony Point!*"

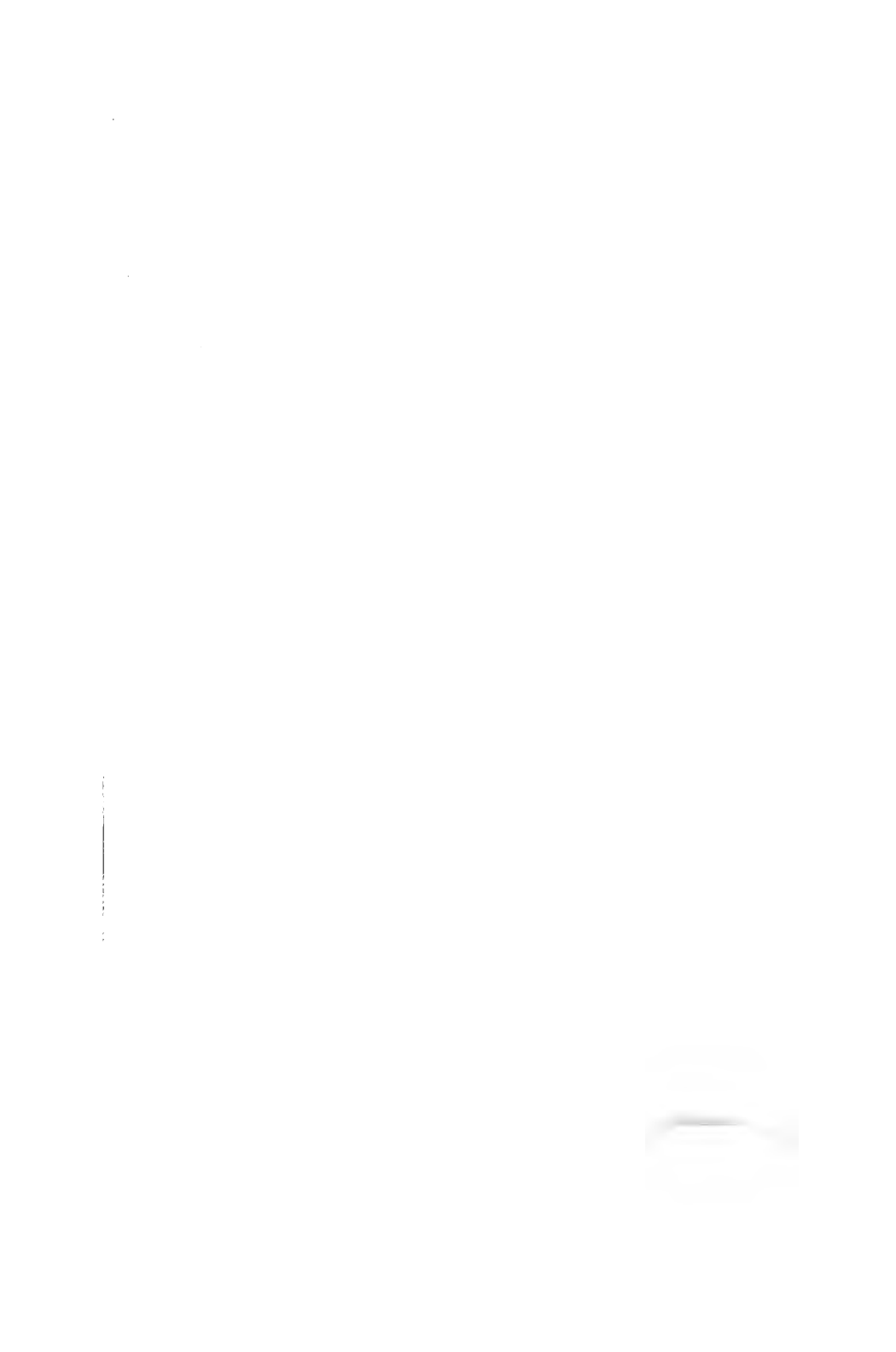
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